

ARGOSY-ALL-STORY WEEKLY

SEPTEMBER 8, 1923

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Dust to Dust

by Isabel Ostrander

*A greater novel than
"Ashes to Ashes," by the same author*

10¢ PER
COPY

SEPTEMBER 8

BY THE
YEAR \$4.00



"RIGHT OVER THE HOME PLATE"



The only Shaving Stick with a *real* handle!

MOST articles that need to be firmly held have a place for the hand to grasp them. Shaving sticks lacked this—until the new Williams' Doublecap arrived.

Doublecap gives you generous parking space for *all* your fingers *all* the time. Your fingers never touch the soap. Because of the greater ease of manipulation with this full-hand hold, Doublecap gives you the quickest shave of any stick ever made. Its non-corrosive metal case will last indefinitely. You can insert a

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In its rich, heavy lather and pleasantly beneficial effect on the skin Doublecap is exactly like all other forms of Williams'. Each and every one gives you the famous Williams' shave which so many other manufacturers have tried to imitate but have never succeeded in duplicating.

Send for free "working model" of this new Doublecap Stick.

This new stick

is made by the makers of the famous Williams' Holder Top Stick and Williams' Shaving Cream with the Hinged Cap.

THE J. B. WILLIAMS COMPANY
Glastonbury, Conn. Montreal, Can.

Williams'

Doublecap Shaving Stick



This "Working Model" of Doublecap FREE!

Here's a little "working model" of Doublecap. It's not a toy but a stick you can use. Contains enough soap to let you test Williams' thoroughly. Your name and address on a post card will bring you this stick free. Or use the coupon below.



THE J. B. WILLIAMS COMPANY
Dept. 9, Glastonbury, Conn.

Send me the free "working model" of Williams' Doublecap Stick as advertised.

Name _____

Address _____

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLIV

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NUMBER 2

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BY FRANCIS LYNDE

will add zest to your appetite for high class fiction. Here is the milk of human kindness turned into the curd of adventure and the whey of evil. It is the cream of romance.

FIRST OF FOUR PARTS SERVED NEXT WEEK

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FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

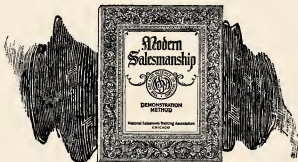
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NOW FREE!

The Book That Has Shown Thousands the Way to Amazing Salary Increases

TAKE this situation: A man who had worked all his life in a routine job at low pay suddenly surprises his friends by moving into a better neighborhood, taking a big house, buying a car and blossoming out as a well-to-do and influential citizen in his new community. How did he do it? What is the secret that he used? Simple enough. He knew that the biggest money in business is in Selling, and though he felt that he couldn't sell a thing, he learned the secrets that make Master Salesmen and then began to make big money.

If only one man had found inspiration enough in this remarkable book to make a brilliant success in the Selling field—in a job paying him many times his former salary—then you might call it luck. But thousands have done it.

Your One Chance to Make the Biggest Money of Your Life

Not one of the men whose names appear below had ever sold a thing before—not a dime's worth. If you had told one of

them that he could sell he would have laughed at you. Yet every one of these men, through reading this book, discovered the fallacy of this vicious old idea that Salesmen are born. They learned that Master Salesmen are made! And in this book they found a comparatively easy way to go from low pay to better earnings.

READ!

Charles Berry of Whitesett, Iowa, stepped from \$18 a week to a positive making him \$1,000 the very first month. J. P. Overstreet of Houston, Texas, read this book, left a job on the United States Police Force, and in six weeks earned \$1,800. F. Wynn, Portland, Ore., an ex-service man, earned \$154.37 in one week. Geo. W. Keating, of Oklahoma City, found in this book a way to jump his earnings from \$60 a month to \$124 in two weeks, and C. W. Campbell learned on it how he could quit a clerking job on the railroad to earn \$1,632 in thirty days.

Simple as A B C

Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. There are certain ways to approach different types of prospects to get their undivided attention—certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, better down break-downs, outwit competition and make the prospect act. If you will learn these principles there is awaiting you a brilliant success and more money than you ever thought of earning. This book, "Modern Salesmanship," tells exactly how the National Salesmen's Training Association will make you a Master Salesman.

As soon as you are qualified and ready the Educational Service of the National Salesmen's Training Association will help you to select and secure a selling position as city or traveling salesman.

Now Free to Every Man Who Will Act at Once

We are not making any extravagant claims about what we will do for you. We don't have to. The records of the real successes for which we are responsible are so overwhelming a testimonial of the fact that any man of average intelligence can become a Master Salesman that we are willing to leave the decision entirely up to you. All of this good and many important features about Salesmanship are contained in "Modern Salesmanship." It is yours—FREE. Send the coupon for it today. It will show you how you can quickly become a Master Salesman—a big money-maker. It will tell you about the National Salesmen's Training Association system of Salesmanship training that has meant prosperity to so many thousands of men—about the National Demonstration Method that gives you actual experience while studying—and all about the fine opportunities that await you in the selling field. Failure to act may mean that you lose the one big chance of your life to leave forever behind you the low pay of a routine job. It may mean the difference between this and a real success at a big salary. Is it worth it to find out? Then mail this coupon NOW.

National Salesmen's Training Association

Dept. 2-M, Chicago, Ill.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION Dept. 2-M, Chicago, Ill.

I simply want to see the facts. Send me FREE your book "Modern Salesmanship" and Prove that I can become a Master Salesman. Also tell how you can help me to a position.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

EMPLOYERS are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. We can put you in touch with just the men you need. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Syllabus and charts sent without obligation.

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WE MANUFACTURE AN ARTICLE OF WEARING apparel that can be sold in almost every home to men or women agents. Reasonably demanded and in competition. No other firm is selling same article direct to consumers. Prices 50% less than retail stores. Our agents make big profits and act them in advance. We deliver and collect. No experience necessary. Full instructions accompanied. Launching out—FREE. We can use part or full time workers. If you want a big money-making proposition—easy sales and no competition—write at once for full details. **WRIGHT & CO., CONGRESS, THIRPOO & HARRISON STREETS, Dept. B-30, Chicago.**

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. **CARNATION CO., Dept. 290, St. Louis, Mo.**

GREATEST SENSATION! ELEVEN PRICE toilet article set selling like blazes at \$1.75 with \$1.00 dressmakers shavers free to each customer. Spring rush on. **FOSTER REID CO., 90 Winlaw Bldg., Station U, Chicago.**

LIVE AGENTS MAKE \$10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splendid Preventer for every water faucet. Taken on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. **A. D. Seed Filter Company, 75 Franklin, New York.**

TAILORING SALESMEN. MAKE \$10.00 PROFIT ON SALE. Get our outfit made-to-measure suits, 100 fabrics. Big prices \$1.00 to \$3.00. Sell your goods. Made for you. Fix your own selling prices. Make all the profit you want. Under sell all competition. Lower prices than any other line—you get big profits in advance and deliver and collect. Guaranteed quality by firm established 1880. Write for full particulars. **FRED KAUFFMANN, The American Tailor, 1300 W. Harrison St., Dept. E-26, Chicago.**

BIG FAST PROFITS FOR AGENTS. "Repeater B" Fuse Plug sell on sight wherever there is electricity. Do away with lightning troubles. Welcomed everywhere. Get details. Sample free. **Moss-Deputy Mfg. Co., Inc., 11-A, Detroit, Mich.**

PORTRAIT, MEDALLION AND PHOTO JEWELRY AGENTS—our goods will make you big profits; delivery guaranteed; prompt shipments; low prices; send for latest catalog. **Adam J. Kraft & Co., 606 Blue Island Ave., Chicago.**

SELL MADISON "BETTER MADE" SHIRTS direct from our factory to wearers. No middleman required. Easy to sell. Big profits. Write for Free Samples. **MADISON MILLER, 593 Broadway, New York City.**

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AGENTS: Big money selling "Packard Shirts" direct to the wearer. We show the latest patterns and our proposition is entirely new. Write today for FREE spring outfit. **PACKARD SHIRT CO., 19 South Wells St., Chicago, Ill.**

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his suit. You charge \$1.50, make \$2.25. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **American Monogram Co., Dept. 24, East Orange, N. J.**

WONDERFUL INVENTION—Eliminates all needles for photographs. Saves time and annoyance. Proves a record. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects. \$15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. **EVERPLAY, Dept. 912, McHugh Bldg., Chicago.**

AGENTS—\$12 DAILY EASY. Introducing Ladies' and Men's sweaters in silk, wool and artificial silk; 12 colors. Latest novelties. Goings like wildfire. You simply show samples we furnish, take orders and deliver and collect. Your very dealer. **MAC-O-CHEE MILLER CO., Form 11410, Cincinnati, O.**

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GO INTO THE CRISPETTE BUSINESS. Everybody likes Crispettes. You can make a lot of money. We start you. Write for facts. **LONG EAKINS, 1951 High St., Springfield, Ohio.**

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS: Near bustling city in lower Mich. 1 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only \$10 to \$50 down; bal. long time. Write today for free illustrated booklet. **SWIGART LAND CO., 7-1915 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.**

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Man and Women Wanted—Earn \$5,000 to \$15,000 Yearly in the dignified, pleasant professions of Radiology, Public Health, Osteopathy, Eye, Pharmacy and Veterinary. University degrees conferred. 15th successful year. Many splendid openings. Write today. **National University of Sciences, 2925 Michigan Blvd., Chicago.**

MATHEMATICS TAUGHT BY MAIL IN SPARE TIME. Home study course in Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Mensuration, Trigonometry, Logarithms and Mechanics. **HARDING SCHOOLS, 76 Brighton, Highland Park, Michigan.**

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN. \$500 EXTRA PROFIT GUARANTEED. Sell Wright's new suit and overcoat made-to-measure \$22.50—\$28.50 retail—HOYS' SUITS \$20.00 lowest prices—biggest money-making line in America. Every sale boy's suit gives you live prospect for men's suit. Women buy too. You double your sales and profits. You get your profits in advance—we deliver and collect. Large samples men and boys clothes in handsome carrying case—Free. Write for full particulars. **WRIGHT & CO., Congress, Thropo & Harrison Sts., Dept. C-30, Chicago.**

Start And Operate Your Own Business and acquire financial independence. •Opportunities everywhere. Either men or women. We furnish everything and show you how. See the explanatory "The Open Door to Fortune" FREE. Write for it now. **National Scientific Laboratories, 12A, Richmond, Va.**

AGENTS—\$15 A DAY—EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG, WEEKLY BONUS—\$1.50 per centum Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. **NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-HF, Chicago.**

DISTRICT SALESMEN WANTED, all or spare time. Earn \$1,500 to \$3,000 yearly. We train the inexperienced. **NOVELTY CUTLERY CO., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.**

MAKE \$75 A WEEK SELLING OUR STRICTLY ALL-WOOL MADE-TO-MEASURE suits all at one amazing low price. You sell on advance and last-chance basis. We supply hand-selling outfit in America. Many exclusive money-making features. Tailoring, raincoat and side-line items, part or full time, get in touch—write us immediately. **GOODWEAR CHICAGO, Inc., Dept. 540, Chicago.**

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. **HO-RO-UD, 113 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.**

AGENTS—CLEAN UP \$100 WEEKLY WITH "NIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 20-40 sales daily frequently made demonstrating, outfit supplied. 50¢ each coin-coaters, all daily necessities. (Postal brings out unique plans. **DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 53, Chicago.**

SELL SOMETHING NINE OUT OF TEN WOMEN WILL BUY because it saves double its cost the day it is bought. 50¢ each. \$2.00 profit on \$3.00 sale. **PREMIER MFG. CO., Dept. 812, Detroit, Mich.**

Tailoring Salesmen; men with appropriate mapbook "Direct To Measure" can earn \$25.00 to \$50.00 weekly. Make suits and overcoats \$28.00. Big advance commissions. Representatives furnished a high grade tailoring shop in one elaborate case. **HOUSE OF CAMPBELL, State at Congress St., Chicago.**

AGENTS—"LIFE OF HARDING"—fastest seller in five years. \$20.00 daily profit. Ready stock terms. Free outfit. **MCCURDY CO., 1428 N. Wells, Chicago.**

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women. \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hubler Bagnall, Drawer 25, East Orange, N. J.**

AGENTS: BIG PROFITS, NO COMPETITION. Make \$5.00 to \$15.00 daily selling our beautiful Scripture Text Calendars. Agents now selling from 10,000 to 50,000 yearly. Write now. **MESSENGER PUBLISHING CO., Dept. 142, 314 West Superior St., Chicago, Ill.**

AGENTS—\$8 TO \$15 DAILY EASY. New Patented Combination Kitchen Scales. You take orders, we deliver and collect. Your day daily. No experience necessary. Men or women. Full or spare time. **MATTHEWS COMPANY, 116 Kennedy Bldg., Cincinnati, O.**

AGENTS: MY PRICES LOWEST EVER. GOOD SUITS \$18 UP. Make \$25 to \$25 daily. **START IN START TIME.** Make \$25 to \$25 daily. A ready-made business. **R. A. ALLEN, 292 B. GREEN, DEPT. 1821, CHICAGO, FOR SPECIAL OFFER TO AGENTS.**

AUTHORS' MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—A wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address: **Authors' Press, Dept. 5, Auburn, N. Y.**

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC. ARE WANTED for publication. Ideas brought to \$500.00. Send Mss., or write **LITERARY BUREAU, 116, Humbolt, Mo.**

SHORT STORIES AND PHOTOPLAY PLOTS REVISED, TYPEWRITTEN and Marketed. Send manuscript, enclosing return postage, for Examination. No obligation. **H. L. HURSH, Dept. 4, 210 Munch St., Harrisburg, Pa.**

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$5—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Adrien free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 200 Security Bldg., Santa Monica and Western Ave., Hollywood, California.**

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



"Mary, I owe it all to you!"

"MR. WILLIAMS called me into his office to-day and told me he was going to raise my salary \$50 a month. I didn't know what to say at first, I was so happy. But I managed to thank him somehow.

"I'm glad to give you this promotion," he said kindly, 'for the best reason in the world. You deserve it.

"You may not know it, but I've been watching your work ever since the International Correspondence Schools wrote me that you had enrolled for a course of home study. They've been sending me your Progress Reports ever since and I'm proud of you. Keep it up, young man, and you'll go far. I wish we had more men like you.'

"I tell you, Mary, that made me feel mighty fine. And to think I owe it all to you! I might still be drudging along in the same old job at the same old salary if you hadn't urged me to send in that I. C. S. coupon!"

SPARE-TIME study with the I. C. S. is winning promotions for thousands of men and bringing happiness to thousands of homes all over the world. In offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to big jobs, over the heads of older men, past those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of you for which some man is going to be picked. The boss can't take chances. When he selects the one to hold it he is going to

choose a trained man with sound, practical knowledge of the work. Get busy right now and put yourself in line for that promotion. You can do it in spare time in your own home through the International Correspondence Schools, just as thousands of other men are doing.

The first step these men took was to mark and mail this coupon. Make your start the same way—and make it right now.

MAIL THE COUPON TO-DAY

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 2207-G, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Better Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Trade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Banking Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy (Including C.P.A.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nicholson Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Spanish | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Architect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Print Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Constructor and Builder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Positions | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing and Heating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metallurgy | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture and Poultry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Engines | |

Name.....

Street.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Style No. 7475
Tony Red Russia Calf
Oxford
Rivet Lest
Also in High Shoe
Style No. 728



ESTAB. 1876

W. L. DOUGLAS

\$7.00 & \$8.00 SHOES ALSO MANY \$5 & \$6
\$4.50 & \$5.00 SHOES FOR BOYS

W. L. DOUGLAS SHOES ARE ACTUALLY DEMANDED YEAR AFTER YEAR
BY MORE PEOPLE THAN ANY OTHER SHOES IN THE WORLD

They are made of the best and finest leathers. The wide range of kinds, styles and prices provides suitable shoes for every occasion, business, travel and motoring. The quality is unsurpassed. The smart styles are leaders in the fashion centers of America. Whatever your ideal of a shoe may be, you will find it in the W. L. Douglas line of shoes.

Why pay high prices for 30.00 shoes? W. L. Douglas \$7.00 and \$8.00 shoes are exceptionally good value. The quality, style and workmanship compare favorably with shoes selling at higher prices. If you had your shoes made to order, you couldn't get more perfect shoes. Frankly, is it not worth while in these days of high cost of living for you to save money on your footwear when the opportunity offers?

For thirty-seven years W. L. Douglas name and portrait have stood for a high standard of quality and dependable value. For economy and satisfactory service, shoes that bear this trade mark. The intrinsic value of a trade mark lies in giving to the consumer the equivalent of the price paid for the goods. Ask your dealer for W. L. Douglas shoes. Look for W. L. Douglas name and retail price stamped on the sole. Refuse substitutes.

IF NOT FOR SALE IN YOUR VICINITY, WRITE
TO ORDER SHOES BY MAIL. POSTAGE FREE.

W. L. Douglas

President W. L. Douglas Shoe Co.
140 Spark Street, Boston, Mass.

TO MERCHANTS: If no dealer in your town handles W. L. Douglas shoes, write today for exclusive rights to handle this quick-selling, quick turn-over line.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. C. J. O., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LTD., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

HELP WANTED—MALE

Foremen, Brakemen, Baggage-men, Sleeping car, train porters (foreign) \$140—\$200. Experience unnecessary. 336 RAILWAY BUREAU, E. St. Louis, Ill.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60, willing to accept Government Positions, \$117—\$180, traveling or stationary. Write Mr. OSMENT, 128, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

BOYS—high school boys, business school students, in every town, 10 represent BOOKKEEPING CHART CO., 256 5th Ave., N. Y. City. Further information, write.

EARN \$10 TO \$250 MONTHLY, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet CM-35, Standard Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEKART COMPANY, 225, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS, BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES, BEST RESULTS, PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 624 F ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS, WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 650 F. Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 48 Owen Ridge, Washington, D. C., or 2274-J Woodworth Ridge, New York.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED on cash or royalty basis. Patented or unpatented. In business 24 years. Complete facilities. References. Write ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 240, St. Louis, Mo.

HIGH GRADE SALESMEN WANTED

SELL COAL IN CARLOAD LOTS at big saving to consumer. Side or main line. Experience unnecessary. Earn week's pay in an hour. WASHINGTON COAL COMPANY, Dept. T, Stock Yards Station, Chicago.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN \$10 TO \$15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Stenciling, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paper-hanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 132 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Here's \$200 a Week for any Man or Woman and a Special Offer for Quick Action-Grab it

I KNOW that there are thousands of men and women who are interested right now in making more money. They want immediate action—without red tape, and without delay. Now I am going to make a personal, special offer that will enable any man or woman to make from \$100 to \$200 a week, depending upon how much time is devoted to my proposition.

How Much Can You Make?

I want a man or woman in each community to act as my representative—to call on my customers and take their orders for raincoats. That's all there is to it. If you take four average orders a day I will pay you \$96 a week. If you only take one average order a day you will make about \$24 a week, and that is easy. Hundreds of my representatives are earning that much. For instance, George Garon made \$40 clear profit his first day. And there is J. R. Head of Kansas, who earned \$69.50 for himself in one day. And W. S. Cooper, who has averaged over \$5,600 a year for six years, working only four hours a day. Just read the records of a few of my representatives—on the right hand side of this page—and you will realize that it is amazingly easy for a man to make from \$100 to \$200 a week at this proposition.

No Experience Is Needed

It is not necessary for you to be a salesman. It is not necessary for you to know anything about raincoats. I will give you all the information you will ever need. There is no trick to taking orders for Comer Raincoats, and the reason is simply this—people are tired of high prices. If they buy coats from stores they have to pay a profit to the merchant, to the jobber, to the clerk—they have to help pay for fine fixtures, and in most cases, they buy a coat that is from six months to two years old. Either the price must be high, or the value must be low.

We manufacture our own coats and sell them direct to our customers by parcel post. Our representatives simply take orders. The values speak for themselves—and with such values, such styles, such materials as we offer, our representatives often take from 2 to 4 orders at a single call.

And because Comer Coats are such big values and sell so easily, E. A. Sweet of Michigan made \$1,200 in a single month—Spencer earned \$625 in one month's spare time—McCrory increased his earnings from \$2 a day to \$9,000 a year.

This Is All You Have To Do

All that my representatives do is to take orders—and they get their money immediately. If your profit for one day is \$10, you will have that \$10 in cash the same day. You don't carry a stock of coats. You don't put up any money. You don't deliver anything, and I do my own collecting through the mail.

Accept My Special Offer

Now—the important thing is to get started. I know that you can make at least \$100 within one week of today and have that \$100 in cash. I know that within a short time you can be making \$200 a week—every week. The important thing is to get started, and get started quick. If you will fill out the coupon with your name and address, I will send you, without any preliminary correspondence, and with absolutely no deposit whatever on your part, a complete selling outfit with full instructions, samples of raincoat material, style book, order blanks, and everything that you will need to make money. I will write you a letter that is so complete, clear and concise that after you read it you will know absolutely where to go, what to say, and how to make money.

Within the past few weeks I have paid my representatives hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I am willing to make this concession to you—send you the complete outfit, confidential information and instructions at once. So if you are one of those men or women who want a real opportunity to establish a big, permanent, substantial and profitable business—if you are sincere and earnest in your desire to make more money, sign and mail the coupon at once. In less than a week you will be making more money than you ever thought possible.

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The Comer Manufacturing Co.
Dept. 317-162, Dayton, Ohio.



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of Kansas, who lives in a small town of 621 people. He has made as high as \$79.50 in one day selling Comer All-Weather Coats.



W. S. COOPER

of Ohio, who finds it easy to earn over \$700 a month selling Comer All-Weather Coats.



E. A. SWEET

an electrical engineer, is making from \$100 to \$1,200 a month and works only about four hours a day.



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— George McCarter



George McCarter

GEORGE MCCARTER found it to his advantage to leave his position, which he held for 25 years as clothing and furnishing goods buyer for one of the finest stores in Kansas, to take up the work of selling J.

B. Simpson made to measure suits and overcoats. He writes: "That was the best move I ever made. Now I am no longer dependent on a salary. My time is my own: the more I work, the more I earn. My business is growing steadily and my earnings getting bigger and bigger. I made \$63.00 yesterday, \$32.50 so far today, \$232.00 last week. How's that?" And in another letter he wrote, "Thanks to you, Simpson, and the marvelous values you give, I'll have \$4000 saved this year over and above my living. I don't understand how you give such big values, but as long as you do I'm satisfied. The best part of all is that you're getting better all the time."

The opportunity to get into the big money class is open to every sincere, earnest man who is industrious and willing to put in as much time working for himself as he would put in when working for others. J. B. Simpson suits and overcoats are such wonderful values and give such universal satisfaction that big money can be made right from the start. Irving Golde made \$793.00 the first six weeks; and now, nearly a year later, is going bigger than ever. E. Schmitz, a former retail clothing salesman, made \$475.00 the first four weeks. Wm. Garden had no trouble in making \$946.00 the first two months, and now nearly two years later is more enthusiastic than ever. Scores of men are making big money with Simpson, for Simpson's all wool suits and overcoats tailored to order for \$31.50 are without a doubt the greatest values ever known. In many cases just to show the cloth and mention the price is enough to get the order.

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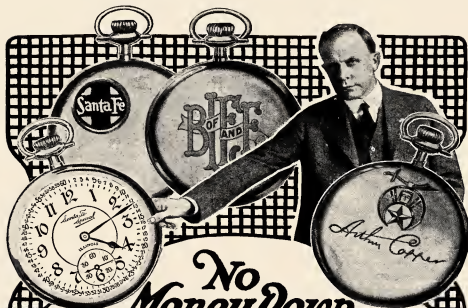
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Slide right into any furnace without change. It gives the best of coal. No motors, gas or electricity.

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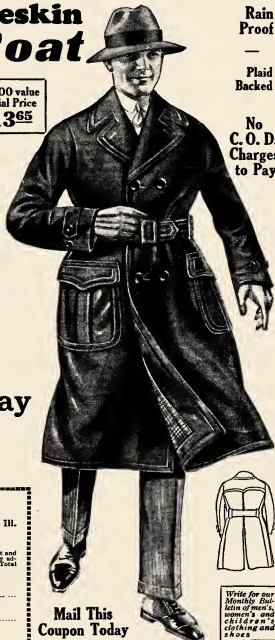
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Dust to Dust

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "McCarty, Incog," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PROPHECY AND PORTENT.

"I DO love a table facing the avenue, don't you?" Mrs. Calvin Yates's childish, slightly nasal tones rang out with unconscious volume above the mellow notes of the orchestra and the gentle hum of well-bred voices about them. "It's interesting to see all the celebrities go by, even though I don't know who half of them are yet!"

1 A

Her companion shuddered fastidiously and raised her lorgnon to glance about her in apprehension, but it was early for the luncheon habitués at this most exclusive of restaurants, and none of her own immediate circle were in view. Then, remembering the check for five thousand dollars now reposing in her bag which she had just borrowed with such ridiculous ease from her lamentably ordinary hostess, Mrs. Sears Edgett smiled indulgently.

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"How naïve you are, my dear!" Her own voice was lowered in suggestive reproach. "You'll find most celebrities unconsciously dull and egotistic, after the first glamour has worn off, of course."

Mrs. Yates flushed, but her small, round-ed chin protruded ever so slightly.

"I've met one who isn't. Oh, he's not exactly celebrated yet, but I'm sure he will be, for he's doing splendid things!"

"Some budding Western genius?" Mrs. Edgett asked banteringly.

"On the contrary. He comes from one of the oldest families here in New York, but he's just a dear, simple boy, and fame, when it comes, isn't going to spoil him a bit. I've ordered a statue from him to put up back home; a memorial to Calvin."

A note of sadness had crept into the plump little widow's tones, but her guest was oblivious to it.

"Surely you don't mean Stephen Munson?" Her eyebrows arched incredulously. "He and his mother have quite dropped out of things since their financial crash, but I heard that he was dabbling in sculpture in some old rookery of a studio down on the wrong side of the square. Pathetic, when you think what the Schuyler Munsons have been for generations! However did you—"

She paused, biting her lip, but Mrs. Yates laughed good-naturedly.

"However did I manage to meet him, did you mean? Through Mr. Rowe, the attorney who is attending to some of my Eastern interests. Oh, do look at the perfectly glorious girl there in that motor!" she broke off irrepressibly. "I don't think I've ever seen any one so absolutely beautiful in my life!"

Mrs. Edgett glanced out at the broad avenue teeming with cars in the bright spring sunshine and gave a slight start.

"Claudia—and out of mourning! My dear," she added impressively, "that is Claudia Langham, last of the Langhams who have been our social autocrats for more than fifty years! When she was introduced—and it was a season noted for the number and beauty of its débutantes, I remember—she stood quite alone, supreme; the belle of the town! Since her father's

death, though, she has shut herself up in that wonderful old mansion of theirs down on the square and refused to see any one. I had not heard that she was going about again; I must call at once!"

"I should think she would have been lonely." A block in the double stream of traffic had halted the car just beyond their window, and Mrs. Yates's admiring gaze was fastened upon the exquisite face of the girl seated alone in the tonneau. Cameo-like in the classical perfection of the small, clear-cut features, there was something regal in the serene, aloof poise of her head with its wealth of shining golden hair beneath the smart little toque, and something imperious, too, in the bow with which she greeted a passing acquaintance. Then her car rolled forward and she was gone.

"Lonely?" Mrs. Edgett shrugged. "If she has been it was by her own choice. But the whole family have been eccentric. Strange tales were told of her grandfather, and they say there is a room in that house— How do, Dicky?"

She held out two languid fingers to a young man who had been making his way toward them between the tables. He was dapper almost to the point of effeminacy, but his light hair was receding from his forehead, and there were telltale lines about his pale, heavy-lidded eyes.

"Mrs. Yates, this is Dicky Tewson." She turned to her hostess. "Do ask him to sit down and have some coffee with us, but beware of him; he's a most wicked person! Who do you think passed just now?"

"Claudia Langham," the newcomer responded promptly as he availed himself of Mrs. Yates's proffered invitation. "Quite radiant, wasn't she? I don't remember ever having seen her appear so human— Galatea come to life, what?"

"I feel sorry for her, somehow." Mrs. Yates spoke impulsively. "A young girl like that all alone, and every one keeping her on a sort of pedestal."

"Sorry for her?" Mrs. Edgett's brows rose again. "She is the one girl I know who has everything, and she is well aware of it. It would take a very brave man indeed to ask her to step down from that pedestal, my dear!"

"Then you haven't heard—" Dicky Tewson paused significantly. "But I forgot you had been away for so long."

"Two months at Hot Springs." She leaned forward, her sharp face avid with interest. "Tell me, Dicky! You don't mean that Claudia—"

"Oh, nothing has been announced, of course, but you know that chap Hamersley?"

"Niles Hamersley?" Mrs. Edgett's well-modulated tones had risen a note. "He's simply fascinating! So distinguished-looking, too, with those tiny patches of gray at the temples, although one does wonder how so young a man should have come by them. His bridge is flawless, and he dances divinely. It is really a pity that he appears to care so little for society. Is it possible that he—that Claudia—"

Farther down the avenue tongues were wagging also as Claudia Langham's car passed. Its progress caused two elderly gentlemen in a certain club window, who had been peacefully comparing their golf scores, to enter into a brief but heated discussion.

"Preposterous, I tell you!" The stout gentleman brought his hand down with a cushiony thud on the arm of his chair. "I've known Drayton Langham's girl all her life—held her on my knee when she was a baby, by George! I'm no he-gossip, but it was common talk that she refused some of the finest young fellows in town the year she came out, and now you tell me she's going to marry this—this nobody? Rot!"

"My wife says so, and she usually knows," his wizened companion maintained with the tenacity of the meek. "Hamersley appears to have all the money he needs, he belongs to the best clubs, goes with the best people—"

"The more fools they!" the other snorted. "Mind you, I've nothing against the fellow, but did you ever notice that he's a little too careful to look you square in the eye and grip your hand like a—a d——d candidate? Hah! What were his people, where'd he get his money, who ever heard of him, anyway, until a couple of years

ago? I dare say he's eligible enough for most of the flappers who clutter up our country clubs, but for Claudia Langham—"

Meanwhile the car containing the girl whose passing had caused so much comment reached the end of the avenue and turned to the right along the north side of the famous square. For many generations it had held its own as the nucleus of fashion, and the stately old mansions which faced it had housed the flower of the city's aristocracy, but that era was gone, and only a few survivors of the older families still clung to the homes of their ancestors.

The girl's eyes, blue as anemones, turned to the budding spring splendor of the square, and she caught her breath with a little gasp of sheer happiness. That drive down the avenue had been like a dream; the massed blur of faces from which a familiar one had stood out here and there for an instant to be vaguely greeted and to vanish, the vast yet somehow far-away confusion of sound, the dazzling brilliance of the sunlight—had it all been real?

Had anything been real since that wondrous moment the night before when Niles Hamersley had taken her in his arms? She could hear once more his fervent whispered words, feel the pressure of his lips against her mouth, and at the memory her senses reeled in ecstasy and she closed her eyes. What madness was this which had entered her veins, which made of the everyday world about her an enchanted place?

The stopping of the car at the curb brought her instantly back to herself, and it was the self-contained, perfectly poised Claudia who alighted and made her way up the steps of the great square pile of brownstone to the wide doors which opened before she reached them to reveal the white-haired butler nodding his greeting.

"Have any messages come for me, George?" she asked mechanically. In just this fashion had the old man opened the same door through countless years to admit two generations of the Langhams, but surely never to one so happy! Never had there been a day like this! She smiled at her own whimsical thought and then her heart missed a beat at his reply.

"Yes, miss. There are flowers which

Annie took upstairs, and Mr. Hamersley telephoned twice and—and Mr. Stephen is in the drawing-room," the old voice quavered. "I told him you would be home soon, and he said he would wait."

"Stephen here? Oh, how nice!" Claudia turned toward the drawing-room and then paused. "Did—what did Mr. Hamersley say, George?"

"Just asked for you the first time, miss. When he called again he said that he would be here at four."

"Very well, George." She turned again, but waited until the butler's shaky footsteps had vanished down the hall, and then pressed both hands suddenly to her cheeks, conscious of their burning. At four! Not quite two hours to wait, and then she would see him again, would hear his voice, feel the tender strength of his arms enfolding her.

"Claudia!" A young man rose from his chair as she entered the drawing-room and advanced impetuously toward her with both hands outstretched and his sensitive, boyish face aglow. "Claudia, I've such news for you! I ran across the square to tell you. I couldn't wait! Mother is at the studio, and I told her I'd bring you back with me for tea, but I wanted to tell you alone, first!"

His slim, strong hands with their tapering fingers clasped her smaller, gloved ones in a squeeze of joyous camaraderie, and she smiled back at him as she disengaged them and gestured toward his chair.

"What is it, Stephen? Do sit down and tell me. I have news for you, too, but mine will keep. Now, what has happened?"

Claudia regarded him with amused affection as she seated herself and started to draw off her gloves. Good old Stevie! He hadn't changed a bit since the days when as children they had played in the square together. His brown hair still curled as absurdly, his deep, brown eyes were just as merrily irresponsible, but as clear and steady. Was she the only one in the world who had changed?

All at once she became conscious that he was speaking again jerkily, as though he had been running hard, and the words fairly tumbled from his lips.

"Can't you guess? You and mother were the only ones who really had faith in me, who thought that I might have a chance! I didn't dare let myself hope for it, dream of it! I can't believe it, now that it has come! Guess, Claudia!"

"I can't." She shook her head vaguely, wishing that her old friend would be a little less exuberant in his joy, yet trying her best to enter into it. "A new order for a fountain, or something?"

"A new order, yes! The—the greatest that could come to me! Why, Claudia, it was you who first suggested that I try for it—we planned it together months ago. You helped me with the first rough sketches, encouraged me when everything seemed to be going wrong—where are your thoughts?" He sprang from his chair again and came to her side.

"Claudia, I've won it! I've won the competition for the heroic group at the new courthouse!"

"Oh, Stephen!" She rose also and gave him her hands again, her own strange, new happiness for the moment completely submerged in his. "I am so glad for you! I knew it, I was sure of it all along, even though the greatest sculptors in the country were competing against you! Your mother must be so wonderfully proud and pleased! Tell her for me how delighted I am—"

"Come over and tell her yourself!" Stephen urged. "She's fixing a most marvelous tea and we'll celebrate—"

"But I can't, Stephen!" A swift thought came to Claudia, and blushing, she made a movement to withdraw her hands from his. "I'm expecting a—a guest here for tea. I'm so very sorry—"

"Oh, can't George say that you're ill, or called away, or something?" There was a deeper, hurt note than mere boyish disappointment in his tones, but Claudia's ears were deaf to it.

"Not to—this guest," she replied softly, and then added in haste: "But I'm glad you came to tell me. Think what it means, Stephen! You are made, your career is assured! You'll be famous—"

"It means more than that to me." His voice had grown suddenly husky with over-

mastering feeling. "It means that some day, if it leads to bigger, greater things, I—I—Claudia! What is—this?"

He was gazing down stupidly, dully at her left hand which he still held in his, and at the single blue-white diamond that blazed upon it.

"That was the news I had for you, Stephen!" For the first time she felt an unaccountable shyness in the presence of her old playmate, and glancing down, failed to meet the look of stunned, incredulous pain in his eyes. "Isn't it wonderful that our happiness should have come to us both at the same time! For you a great career, and for me—I am going to be married, Stephen!"

Somehow she could not say the word "love" to him. It held a new, mysteriously sweet meaning, too sacred to be uttered save in one presence, and with her thoughts lingering upon it she did not note the long moment that passed before he regained command of himself.

"You, Claudia! Why, you—you've swept me off my feet! I wish you all the happiness in the world, my dearest girl! I never dreamed—but the only wonder of it is that it did not come to you before this, with the army of suitors in your train, princess! I'm tremendously glad—"

He paused, in dire fear lest his voice should fail him, but Claudia laughed softly.

"'Princess!'" she echoed. "That was your name for me when we were kiddies, wasn't it? I'm swept off my feet, too, Stephen. It all happened so quickly that I scarcely realize it myself, but I wanted to tell you before the formal announcement."

"Who is he?" Stephen smiled and straightened his shoulders. "Who is the luckiest man in the world?"

Claudia glanced downward at her ring once more.

"I am going to marry Niles Hamersley."

"Good—God!" Stephen backed away from her, his voice suddenly hoarse. "Not he! Not that man! Claudia, you mustn't, you shan't!"

For a moment she gazed at him, bewildered. Could she have heard aright? Yet surely there could be no mistaking the look

of dismay almost akin to horror upon his face, the half-incredulous entreaty in his eyes. The room whirled around her, but she drew herself up proudly.

"Stephen, you are beside yourself! You cannot know what you are saying! I shall not even ask you to explain—"

"Claudia! You must hear me! You spoke just now of the time when we were kiddies, when we used to play together in the square, and on rainy days up in the cupola here. We often pretended that we were brother and sister, do you remember?" He choked, but went on with a sort of deadly earnestness. "For the sake of those days, won't you try to pretend for a minute now that I am your brother, and let me speak? You must not marry Niles Hamersley!"

One hand went to her throat, but she still held herself imperiously erect.

"If you hadn't recalled how long our friendship has lasted I—I would have to tell you that it was at an end here and now." She spoke very slowly and distinctly. "What possible reason can you have for thinking that Mr. Hamersley is—is not all that the world believes him to be, all that is splendid and fine?"

Stephen's hands were clenching and unclenching at his sides in an agitation bordering on frenzy, and his voice was shaking as he replied:

"I have no reason, Claudia. It is mere blind instinct, I suppose. I never met the man until you brought him to my studio, but from the first I realized there was something hidden and furtive about him—sinister if you like. There is a shadow upon him! I know nothing against him, but I do not need to know—I feel it—here!"

With an unconsciously dramatic gesture those working hands went to his breast, and before Claudia could speak he burst out: "I beg, I implore you, as you value your happiness, don't take this rash, impulsive step! I can't explain, but I feel as surely as though I were looking into the future that it can bring you only unspeakable suffering—tragedy!"

"You are mad!" Claudia's eyes flashed. "I shall not listen to another word of this wild raving! You have outrageously at-

tacked the man I care for, the man who is to be my husband, through a prejudice as wicked as it is senseless! Please go. I—I shall not find it easy to forgive you!"

He hesitated, his eyes searching hers beseechingly, but reading only resentment and utter disdain in their depths, he bowed his head and moved slowly to the door. On the threshold he turned and said brokenly:

"I would give my life, Claudia, if I could make you see and understand! Remember always, even though you hate me now, that I am your friend, standing by if any sorrow or harm should come to you. I can only pray to God that it may be averted, that you will be happy!"

He was gone, and Claudia's resentment gradually gave place to renewed wonder, although the hurt remained. That he, her childhood friend, should have been the first to cloud her happiness even for a moment, to dim the radiance of this perfect day! His outburst would have been ridiculous, absurd if it had been directed against any one else, but against Niles it was undeniable. Stephen could never be the same to her again, although in justice she tried to find excuses for his wholly incomprehensible attitude.

The boy was overwrought. Her news had been a shock, and the thought of losing the companionship which her marriage to any one would take from him in great measure must have aroused a jealousy which she never guessed lay dormant in his generous nature. Something furtive and sinister about Niles—her Niles? A shadow upon him? She smiled in contemptuous repudiation of such madness. The whole distressing episode must be put from her mind, not another moment of this precious day should be marred—and soon Niles would be here!

Her heart sang anew, and, humming a gay little tune, she ran lightly up the stairs to her room where an elderly woman, erect as a girl in spite of her gray hairs, hurried forward, beaming.

"I opened your flowers, Miss Claudia." She gestured toward a mass of glowing red roses in a vase upon the table. "This was with them."

"Oh, what beauties!" Claudia bent to bury her face in the cool fragrance of their bloom, and then eagerly drew the card from the envelope which the maid had extended. "I must change my gown, Annie, and I know my hair is in a dreadful state! Mr. Hamersley is coming at four."

She did not hear the faithful Annie's reply, nor heed the adoring gaze fastened upon her, for her own eyes were traveling swiftly over the message penned in a bold, heavy masculine hand: "A hostage to my love until I come."

His own voice, tender, compelling, seemed to repeat the words lingeringly in her very ears, and Claudia's pulses leaped as a warm flush mounted in her cheeks. "His love!" She was his love forever and forever! Why had she never dreamed that life could be as wonderful as this? The future stretched in a golden haze before her, endless days of unclouded happiness through the changing seasons and the growing years with Niles's love enveloping her as his arms had held her last night.

With a blissful little sigh she looked up to meet her maid's eyes.

"Ah, but it does my heart good to see you like this!" Annie exclaimed. "Sometimes I've despaired of you, Miss Claudia."

"Why?" Claudia smiled.

"All the splendid young gentlemen who came courting when you first went in society three years ago, and you as sweet but as cold to them as the Ice Queen I used to read about to you out of that fairy book when you was a little bit of a thing!" The rheumatic fingers, trembling slightly, unhooked her frock. "I had hopes of this one or that one, but you sent them all away, and I was afraid that pride of yours would never let you stoop to any man."

"I haven't!" Claudia cried joyously. "I feel very humble, Annie. Mr. Hamersley is—oh, there isn't another man like him in all the world! I can scarcely realize even yet that he cares for me."

She seated herself before the dressing table and the old woman sniffed as she took down the shining hair.

"Why wouldn't he, if he's human?" she demanded indignantly. "It's your happiness I'm thinking of, for you had every-

thing before but love, and now you have that too! I only wish your dear mother was here to see this day!"

"I wonder," Claudia spoke as though to herself—"I wonder if she could possibly have been as happy as I am now?"

Annie glanced hurriedly upward with a curious, shrinking look in her eyes.

"There was never a girl who didn't think that, when she first got engaged, Miss Claudia." There was an odd note of repression in her tone. "If Mr. Hamersley is as good— Take care!"

The handle of a small mirror on the edge of the dressing table had caught in the lace sleeve of Claudia's negligee, but the maid swooped upon it before any damage was done.

"If you broke it," she began tremulously, "there would have been seven years of bad luck ahead of you and nothing in this world—"

"Nonsense, you superstitious old darling!" Claudia interrupted with a laugh. "I don't believe in signs and omens and I'm immune against all bad luck! Oh, hurry—it's nearly four!"

The clock was just striking the hour when old George knocked upon the door.

"Is it Mr. Hamersley?" Claudia asked eagerly as she fastened a blood red rose at the belt of her soft blue gown. "Please say that I am coming—"

Her voice was lost in a dull heavy crash in the room just above that shook the ceiling, and the tinkling echo of shattered glass seemed to vibrate on the air.

The girl's heart stood still. It was the first sound in many long years to come from that room—what could it mean? She saw old George lean suddenly against the door casing as his shaking knees almost gave way beneath him and a grayish pallor overspread his face. Then Annie's low cry reached her ears.

"The picture up in the sealed room! The picture fell! That means—death!"

Death! Signs and omens again! Claudia's lip curled and she drew herself up disdainfully.

"It means worn wires and rusted hooks—nothing more! It shall stay where it has fallen, for the room must not be

opened; that was my father's wish. And let me hear no more of that dismal croaking, Annie! No harm can come to me or to this house."

Brushing past the quaking form of the butler, she went confidently down the stairs to greet Niles Hamersley.

CHAPTER II.

VOW AND COVENANT.

A TALL, lissome figure, more statuesque than ever in the straight lines of gleaming white satin, wide, deep blue eyes that shone with a soft, humid light and a glimmer of golden hair beneath the sweeping veil of creamy, old lace—it was a radiant figure indeed which looked back at Claudia from the tall mirror!

Involuntarily she caught her breath with a little gasp. Could it really be she, a bride? In an hour—in less, for it was almost high noon—she would be the wife of Niles Hamersley. How strange it seemed! The weeks of preparation, hurried yet dragging, appeared now to have passed like a dream, but it was a dream from which she could not seem to waken.

A sense of almost theatric unreality pervaded her, as though she had been dressed to play a part and was waiting for the curtain to rise. The gentle patter of the warm June rain against the window, the heavy, cloying perfume of her bridal bouquet, the smooth, cool touch of Niles's pearls about her neck—were they not all mere details of a set scene?

She was fingering the pearls meditatively when a long drawn quivering sigh sounded from behind her, and she turned.

"Goodness, Annie! Are you going to cry again?"

"I might, any minute, though they'd be tears of joy for you, my lamb, not sadness," Annie smiled, but her expression grew lugubrious once more as she glanced toward the window. "It's a great pity, though, that you didn't have a fine day for your wedding. If only that dratted rain would stop! 'Happy is the bride that the sun—'"

"Oh, the weather doesn't matter."

Claudia turned to the mirror again. "It will be a blessing if it helps to keep the crowd away from the church doors. Are you sure you won't change your mind and come, Annie? It's my one disappointment to-day—not to have you present at my marriage."

The old woman shook her head stubbornly.

"I couldn't, Miss Claudia—I just couldn't a-bear it. My feelings would get the best of me, even though they'd be happy ones, and I don't want to break down so's I couldn't go away with you on your wedding trip. There are a few odds and ends to pack yet, but you know I'll be thinking of you every minute—thinking and praying."

Impulsively Claudia swept the erect, frail little figure into her arms and kissed her.

"I'm sure you will, you darling! Isn't it time for Uncle Matt to be here?"

"Any minute now." Annie hesitated. "Miss Claudia, if you'll take the advice of the old woman who first laid you in your mother's arms, you won't wear those pearls to-day."

"Not wear them?" Claudia exclaimed, amazed. "Not wear Mr. Hamersley's gift!"

"They were a sad choice, in spite of their beauty!" Annie shook her head. "Pearls are tears!"

"If they are," Claudia smiled in all the confidence of her love, "they will be the only ones Mr. Hamersley will cause me to know! Tell me, do I look—well, Annie? I want to look nicer to-day in his eyes than ever before."

"You're the loveliest thing in all the world!" the fond old voice crooned. "The loveliest bride that ever entered the church. There'll not be one there nor at the reception afterward but will remember you to their dying day."

Claudia made a little grimace of distaste.

"I wish Uncle Matt hadn't insisted on that huge formal reception at the Belmonte! I should like to have gone quietly away immediately after the ceremony, but Uncle Matt has been so kind all these years and his heart was so set upon it that I couldn't bear to refuse."

"Mr. Rowe was right, deary. A wedding in the Langham family means something to the world and you're the last of the line, so it's only fitting and proper that it should be celebrated right. The last of the Langham weddings should be the grandest of all!"

Annie droned on reminiscently as she touched her young mistress's costume here and there with deft, solicitous fingers, but the girl scarcely heard. The last of the Langham weddings! In such a short space of time now she would be Claudia Hamersley, and her thoughts lingered upon the name like a caress. It was as though she were stepping into a new personality—and yet that sense of unreality still prevailed. The man who was to meet her at the altar steps—would his be the same tender, adorably familiar presence or would the very fact that she was putting her life into his keeping make him seem a stranger?

Then his face arose before her, gray eyes alight and mobile lips set in the little half smile she knew so well and an answering wave of joyous reassurance surged over her. Niles could never for an instant seem other to her than his own dear self, who had taken her heart by storm and would hold it forever.

Matthew Rowe, her father's closest friend and the Langham attorney since long before her birth, was to give the bride away, and now when old George, resplendent in a new morning coat and white boutonniere, came up to announce his arrival Annie bustled downstairs with her mistress's cape. Claudia lingered for a moment gazing with soft eyes about the dainty room.

It had been hers since her earliest girlhood, its furnishings and appointments chosen with loving care by the mother who had died abroad when she was fifteen, and here had Claudia dreamed and planned through the long school holidays, from here had she gone forth to the ball which marked her formal introduction to society, and it was here that she had known the deep heartache and sorrow when her father had been taken from her. She had often wondered if she would ever leave it, a bride, and now the moment had come!

Although they were to live here in the

old house when the honeymoon was over it would be the main suite, that had been her father's and mother's, which they would in turn occupy, and Claudia Langham would never again enter this sanctum of her girlhood—it would be Claudia Hamersley, a strange woman, who would next cross its threshold. Her glance lingered in half whimsical, half sad farewell on one familiar object after another and then last of all fell once more on the vision in the mirror. Merrily she curtsied to it and then with head held high and heart beating fast she turned and went down the broad staircase.

The tall, straight, elderly figure which waited at its foot gave an uncontrollable start and then held out both hands in silent greeting, the eloquence which had brought him victory in many a celebrated case overwhelmed for the moment in a tide of emotion. When at length Matthew Rowe spoke his deep, sonorous tones were husky and trembling.

"My dear, I could have sworn you were your mother, as she was the day your father brought her home! You are a picture of loveliness!"

Claudia smiled and raised herself on tip-toe to kiss him lightly on the forehead.

"Of happiness as well, I hope, Uncle Matt, or my looks would belie me!" she cried with tremulous gayety.

"You are happy, my child?" He tilted her chin to look into her eyes. "You are sure of yourself, sure of your own mind and heart? You are taking a step to-day, this very hour, which you can never undo. Are you sure you have considered well?"

Claudia drew back in cold displeasure as much at herself as at him, for the unwonted solemnity of his tone had affected her, but she forced a little laugh.

"I do believe, you old cynic, that your legal experience has convinced you no woman knows her own mind! No wonder you've always remained a bachelor! Seriously, Uncle Matt, I don't think any woman was ever, ever as happy as I am to-day, or as sure of herself and the future! Does that satisfy you so that you can give me in marriage with a contented mind and a clear conscience?"

"Yes, my dear! I have stood *in loco*

parentis to you for two years, remember, and perhaps I am jealous of relinquishing my self-appointed guardianship! I wish you every happiness, always, Claudia!" He kissed her with fatherly gentleness and then added in his usually urbane manner: "It is time to start now. Is the car here, George?"

"Yes, sir." The old butler came forward from the end of the hall holding his silk hat at a careful angle. "Miss Claudia has given me permission to ride in front with the chauffeur—"

"Quite right. Let me have that cape, Annie. All ready, my child?"

"Yes, Uncle Matt." Claudia gently disengaged herself from a last, clinging embrace of her old nurse who, smiling valiantly through her tears, stood at the door as they descended the steps under the canopy of striped awning and, between two huddled groups of curious sightseers, entered the waiting car.

As they rolled off the rain pattered on the windows and the trees now in full leaf in the square bent before the sharp gusts of wind. The girl glanced beyond them to the shabby old brick studio building which showed mistily through the downpour and remarked impulsively:

"I wonder if Stephen will come to my wedding? I sent him an invitation, of course, as well as his mother, but I have heard nothing from her since her note of congratulation when my engagement was formally announced. I told Stephen before that, Uncle Matt, and he behaved very ungraciously about it, poor boy!" She laughed softly. "I've been his confidante and companion for so long that I believe with the selfishness of genius he had come to look on me as his exclusive property. It never occurred to him that I would marry anybody!"

The attorney glanced at her in astonishment, but her smile expressed only a half pitying, half amused tolerance and his lips tightened. After a moment he said quietly:

"Mrs. Munson went away a month ago and I understand that Stephen has shut himself up in his studio and is working night and day to execute the commission my Western client, Mrs. Yates, gave him.

By the way, my dear, did you send her an invitation, too, as I asked?"

Claudia nodded with a little grimace.

"Yes. Mrs. Edgett brought her to call, you know. She's very natural, isn't she?"

"Vulgar, you mean?" Matthew Rowe shrugged. "She is not the usual type of climber—not at all ambitious to thrust her way into a society which is reluctant to receive her, but frankly, avowedly anxious to enjoy life, to like everybody and be liked in return. I suppose an earlier generation of Langhams would have turned in their graves at the thought of a parvenu being among the wedding guests—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that, Uncle Matt!"

Claudia turned to him reproachfully. "Other times, other manners, and I found her very amusing. If it will give her any real pleasure to be here I am glad; I want every one to be happy around me to-day! Goodness, what a mob!"

They had neared the canopy which stretched down from the church doors and a veritable sea of umbrellas bobbed and jostled each other in a vast expanse on either side and even across the avenue. George clambered down, tottering but with great dignity, to open the door, and when Matthew Rowe handed down the bride the murmur of admiration from the bystanders swelled to a scattered cheer. It was lost, however, in the rolling, deep-throated tones of the organ welling out in the opening strains of the wedding march as Claudia, after halting for an instant to be divested of her cape, laid her tiny gloved hand on the arm of her father's old friend and the great door opened before them. Huge as it was, the edifice was packed to the doors with the most brilliant throng it had held in many a day for people of note in the diplomatic world, as well as social and financial, had come from afar to do honor to this daughter of the Langhams, and splendid uniforms vied with the vivid gowns and scintillating jewels of the feminine guests in undulating waves of color on either side of the aisle. A little stir ran like a wavering breeze over the assembly, but Claudia neither saw nor heard.

Outwardly as calmly, regally poised as ever, she walked slowly, steadily up the

aisle, her eyes filled with a soft radiance gazing straight before her, seeking not the minister who had stepped forward beside the bishop at the altar, but the stalwart figure who stood beside it, waiting her.

She felt that her heart was leaping from her breast, breaking its bonds to go before her and meet his, and when she found his gaze bent upon her with a proud, almost reverential light in the warm gray eyes her own clung for a moment, then wavered and fell and a wave of emotion swept over her such as she had not known even in the first wonderful moment of her betrothal.

The distance to the altar seemed to stretch interminably before her, but all at once she was there before its steps, and Niles Hamersley had stepped forward and taken his place beside her.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together—" The rich, deep voice intoned majestically, echoing back from the vaulted arches above, but Claudia was only dimly conscious of snatches of phrase. "Honorable among all men—not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly—if any man can show just cause—let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

A perfunctory instant of silence fell and then the majestic voice went on and it was borne in upon her that Niles was being addressed.

"Keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

The voice of the man beside her rang out strongly and proudly in the response, and Claudia thrilled with exaltation at his tone. Lifted far above herself she was only half conscious of the words spoken to her and when they ceased she wondered if the sweet, clear, bell-like voice which sounded in her ears could be indeed her own.

"I will."

After that she was dimly aware that Uncle Matt had stepped forward, that some one had placed her hand in the firm, tender clasp of Niles's and that he was speaking again, repeating his troth to her, and presently she found herself saying steadily, composedly the words which that solemn intoning voice prompted.

"... My wedded husband ... from this

day forward . . . till death us do part . . . I give thee my troth"

The cool, narrow circlet of Niles's ring slipped down over her finger and she could feel it cutting into her flesh from the unconscious strength with which he held it there, but she only nestled her hand the more closely in his. She knew that they knelt in prayer, but it was only when they had risen and the organ and full choir burst upon her ears in a joyous psæan that Claudia's consciousness returned to her in full measure, although the exaltation remained.

Niles Hamersley drew her hand gently within his arms, pressing it against his side with a wealth of tenderness, and her fingers closed shyly upon his sleeve as they started down the aisle. Here and there familiar, smiling faces impressed themselves upon her from the closely packed throng, but down in one of the last rows near the door one countenance seemed to leap out with the sudden clarity of a screen projection.

It was that of a man totally strange to her who was seated at the end of the pew; a dark, oddly sardonic face which appeared to her startled eyes to be leering unaccountably at them. And as they passed the man swayed or leaned out into the aisle and his voice grated upon her ears. The words, uttered to the man at her side did not reach her, but the low, guttural tone was like the lash of a whip and she could feel Niles's whole body stiffen and his arm flex beneath the touch of her fingers.

Had he made a slight, almost imperceptible gesture toward the man at the end of the pew? Involuntarily Claudia glanced up into his face, and then it seemd to recede from her in a black, swirling shadow of horror, but even as she faltered the shadow cleared and he was staring straight before him, his face as set and gray as though carved in stone.

Claudia knew that she must be mad, that the emotions of that hour had temporarily deprived her of her senses, but she could not take her eyes from that grim mask of the man who was her husband. Surely when they reached the church doors, when they were out in broad daylight this hideous vision would fade, the mask would fall!

Her heart was pounding wildly and bands seemed tightening about her throat as her little, satin-shod feet sought the way blindly before her, but if Niles was conscious of her gaze he gave no sign. Like an automaton he walked beside her, and so they reached the entrance.

Some one placed her cape about her and gave his hat to Niles and then the outer doors were thrown open and the cold, steely light of the rainy day beat full upon them. Niles winced, it seemed to her horrified gaze that he cringed, and the stoical mask fell, indeed! Distorted with passion, his face was that of an utter stranger to her, as strange and hideous as that of the man at the end of the pew, and unconsciously she shrank away from him.

The glistening umbrellas on either side of that sheltered aisle bobbed ecstatically once more and the scattered cheer rose again to gain in volume, but surely those were slow, stealthy footsteps following theirs!

Claudia's heart ceased to beat and settled like a dead thing in her breast while an ice-cold fluid raced through her veins. Did Niles hear those footsteps? Did he know? Surely his expression was changing—the rage was mingled now with other emotions which she could not read, but which rendered it no less repellent to contemplate. The gray eyes were moving, darting lightninglike glances from side to side and the chiseled, mobile lips were moving, too, in a twisted fashion, while the gray pallor had deepened to a horrible, pasty semblance of dead flesh!

Her hand slipped from his arm as they reached the waiting car with the chauffeur beaming beside it and holding the door expectantly open. Claudia hesitated, for those footsteps had paused just behind them. All at once she felt Niles grip her elbow in a grasp of steel and she was lifted rather than aided into the car and dropped into her seat.

Her veil caught on something, but it was torn ruthlessly free, and as she turned to gaze out the door Niles raised his foot to the step and then—

A little choking gasp escaped from Claudia's lips, for a gloved hand had been laid upon her husband's arm and over his

shoulder appeared the dark, ugly face of the man who had accosted him in the church. It was not leering now, but lowering in an unmistakably menacing command, and Niles turned and spoke to him.

The colloquy was brief, but to the stunned girl it seemed that countless ages passed before the man in whose hands she had just irrevocably placed herself turned and, stooping, thrust his head in the door of the limousine.

"Claudia, something unforeseen has occurred. I can say no more here, but don't be frightened or alarmed. I want you to go back to your home and wait for me. We cannot leave the city to-day, and you must make what explanations you can for our absence from the reception. I will come to you surely within a few hours—a day at most. We mustn't delay here another moment for the guests are coming out—do you understand? You will go home—and wait?"

Mutely she nodded and he turned to the astonished chauffeur.

"Drive Mrs. Hamersley back to the house at once, please, and quickly. We have changed our plans."

For a moment the man hesitated, glancing in at Claudia, but she nodded, forcing herself to gesture imperiously forward, and as he sprang up behind the wheel Niles spoke to her once more.

"Claudia, for God's sake, don't look like that!! Claudia, wait—wait until I come to you!"

She shrank back in her seat as the door closed and the car rolled off and shudder after shudder shook her rigid body, for at last she had read his expression aright. Passion was there, a rage almost murderous in its intensity, but it was overshadowed by fear. Fear and—guilt!

CHAPTER III.

HOURS OF DARKNESS.

HOW she reached home Claudia never afterward knew. Swift as the chauffeur sent the car forward she was subconsciously aware of curious faces peering in at the solitary figure in bridal array. She pulled down the curtains at the win-

dows with blindly fumbling hands and then sank back again.

She felt only the numbing shock of one regaining consciousness after falling from a great height and it seemed that a paralysis had settled alike over brain and heart and body. Suffering would come when she could think and feel again, but dimly she was grateful for the respite. If only she was home!

The primitive instinct of a wounded creature to seek its accustomed shelter arose above every other emotion and the wheels gliding so smoothly over the wet pavement seemed to make no progress. Home! Surely hours, years had passed since she had left it with Uncle Matt, since she had felt old Annie's tremulous arms about her in that last loving farewell!

But had it really been she? That girl of the morning with her hopes and dreams and strange, unreal happiness—what had become of her? Had she actually existed or was she merely a figment of the confused, disordered fancies which appeared to have taken the place of memory? Impersonally, Claudia found herself rather pitying that other girl who had been so innocently, arrogantly assured that no blow could ever fall upon her—that she was immune from all harm. She was gone forever, blotted out of existence as a candle's light is snuffed and only the shell of her remained.

The car stopped at last, the door opened, and the chauffeur, with a wooden countenance, assisted her to alight.

"I—" Claudia paused, and began again with painful deliberation: "We shall not need you again to-day, John."

"Very good, ma'am." John's honest face crimsoned and he opened his lips to speak, but if he had intended to offer his congratulations something in his mistress's expression stopped him, and he asked instead: "Shall I call up in the morning, as usual?"

A little knot of people had gathered once more to stare and gape at the bride, and Claudia inclined her head and then went swiftly up the steps. As she reached out her hand to sound the bell the door opened and Annie held out both hands to her in wordless consternation.

"It's all right, Annie," Claudia said

through stiffened lips. "Shut the door quickly."

"But, my lamb, what is it?" the old woman asked fearfully as she obeyed. "What has gone wrong? Oh, I felt it, I knew it! Something dreadful has happened to stop the marriage!"

"No," replied Claudia, and the dead thing which was her heart weighed still heavier in her breast. "I am married, Annie. Mr. Hamersley was called away suddenly just after the ceremony, and of course I couldn't go to the reception without him. I am going to change my gown."

She started for the stairs, but the maid clutched at her sleeve.

"Called away!" she echoed. "What should call a man away without the wife he'd just taken? Miss Claudia, look at me! There's something back of all this—"

The sharp ringing of the telephone interrupted her, and Claudia went with leaden feet into the library and took up the receiver. Her absence from the reception must already have been discovered and her pride revolted at the thought of the whispers which must even now be starting, to spread presently into a hideous chorus of scandal. No matter what the future might hold, no matter what horrible thing from Niles Hamersley's past had brought that expression to his face, the other name which she had borne until that hour must be upheld.

"Claudia, is that you?" Matthew Rowe's voice came to her, peremptory with anxiety. "What is the meaning of this? What has happened? Why are you there alone?"

So he knew! Claudia's heart began to beat heavily, but she schooled herself to reply calmly and naturally.

"I'm awfully sorry, Uncle Matt. I hope you'll forgive us. Just tell the people that we have played a trick on you and stolen away on our honeymoon without attending—"

"That's all very well!" he interrupted her tersely. "I'll make all the excuses possible, but I want an explanation myself! People are bound to know that Hamersley left you at the church door; one of the ushers saw a man follow you and stop your

husband just as he was getting into the car and you drove off alone. My God! What does it mean?"

"I cannot explain over the telephone, Uncle Matt. Something has occurred which made it absolutely necessary for Niles to absent himself for a short time, but I am waiting for him now." She caught her breath and for an instant her teeth bit deeply into her lower lip. Then she went hurriedly on: "I'll write to you as soon as I can and explain. Nothing is wrong except our rudeness in treating you this way, but please believe that it was unavoidable."

"Claudia, it's no use. I am acting as your father would have done, and I know you're in trouble. I shall be at the station when the time comes for your train, and if you are not there I am coming straight up to the house and find out the truth!"

His tones rang with the determination which the girl knew would brook no denial and her dazed brain strove wildly for a means of putting him off.

"Dear Uncle Matt, there isn't any trouble, really!" She tried to laugh lightly, but checked herself at the rising note of hysteria which sounded in her own ears. "Don't you know I would have sent for you if there had been? Please wait until you hear from me—"

"If you are not at the station I shall come," he interrupted once more, and she heard the click of the receiver as he rang off.

"Oh, deary, let Mr. Rowe come to you!" Annie stood wringing her hands in the doorway. "If Mr. Hamersley has deserted you—"

"Be quiet!" Claudia's tense nerves snapped at last and she spoke in a tone the old woman had never heard before. "Do not dare to utter another word! George will return now at any minute, and when Mr. Rowe calls late this afternoon he is to tell him that I have gone to join my husband. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Claudia," Annie faltered meekly and followed as her mistress swept pass her and up the stairs.

Claudia hesitated for an instant on the threshold of her room and then, entering, went slowly to the mirror. Could that

drawn, white face be indeed her own, those hard, tearless, staring eyes and colorless lips be the same which had smiled back at her so happily only an hour before? No wonder John had been embarrassed and Annie filled with amazement and concern!

She must brace herself for just a few minutes longer and endure the faithful old creature's lamentations until she could dismiss her and be alone with her thoughts.

With a sudden, swift movement she tore the veil with its coronet of orange blossom from her head and tossed aside the drooping bouquet whose cloying odors stifled her. Annie, who had entered at her heels, said nothing but began to unfasten the wedding gown with shaking fingers, her face working in the effort to keep back her tears. When her task was only half completed Claudia stripped the gown from her and, dropping into a chair, drew off the satin slippers as though their very touch were contamination.

"You won't put on your traveling dress just yet, Miss Claudia?" Annie ventured at last.

"No. We are not going to leave town to-day. Mr. Hamersley may not return himself before to-morrow or the next day. Annie"—she reached up and took the old woman's hands contritely in both of hers—"I'm sorry I spoke to you as I did just now. I know I have always told you everything, but this is different; it's something of the utmost importance to Mr. Hamersley—to both of us—and I can't discuss it even with you. Please don't be silly and cry, or ask me any more questions, for everything will be all right."

Annie shook her head, sighing.

"I'll not ask, but I didn't bring you up from a baby without knowing you better than any one alive, and you can't deceive me. Well, I knew when you all but broke the mirror the very day after you was first engaged, and then the picture fell in—in the closed room overhead—that grief and misfortune would come, but little did I think to see it happen so soon and like this! Think of the talk it'll make already, with everybody waiting at the reception! After all we've been through and never a whisper—"

She checked herself hastily with an involuntary glance ceilingward, but Claudia was too deeply engrossed in her own wretched thoughts to give heed.

"It cannot be helped," she said shortly. "Just put me into something loose and comfy, Annie, and then leave me for a while. I'm going to lie down, but I'll ring when I want you. Don't forget that message for George."

"The cook and the rest of the maids have started already on their vacation, but I'll make you a nice hot cup of tea and a bite of lunch right away," the old woman announced firmly. "I know what's best for you, Miss Claudia!"

She bustled out of the room, and Claudia threw herself on the bed, crossing her arms over her hot, dry eyes.

The scene in the church rose before her mental vision once more, and she strove to recall every detail, seeking to find some key to the hideous problem. One thing was certain; the blow had fallen as unexpectedly on Niles Hamersley as it had upon herself. When he stood beside her at the altar no premonition that this specter from the past would arise to confront him could have entered his mind.

She recalled the sudden stiffening of his whole body, the involuntary tensing of the muscles of the arm upon which her hand rested as he recognized the man at the end of the pew, and the harsh, low words grated on his ears. Looking back, Claudia was sure that with his free arm he must have made that gesture which at first she only fancied; the intruder had been about to make a scene there and then, but Niles had motioned him outside.

Whatever its nature, the shock must have been frightful indeed to bring that look of rigid immobility to his face. Then rage had come, a blind, insensate, berserk fury of which she would never have believed him capable; but after that he was afraid! The fear had been as unmistakable as the revelation of secret guilt, the admission written upon his gray, distorted features that the nemesis which had overtaken him at this triumphant moment of his life was a deserved one!

Annie entered and placed a tray on the

low stand at her elbow, but Claudia did not move nor speak, and when the door had closed softly once more her tormented thoughts went back again to that scene at the church door. The face of the stranger was indelibly imprinted on her memory. She felt that she would know him again though fifty years should pass. Sallow rather than swarthy, with a broad, flat nose, thin, sharply modeled lips of astonishing, repulsive redness, straight black brows and dark, narrowed eyes with the sullen glitter of a snake's between the heavy lids, the man would have been distinctive anywhere in spite of his comparatively small, slight stature. The gloved hand that had clutched at Niles Hamersley's arm was almost feminine in its slenderness of outline. His attire had been correct enough, but something oddly, intangibly foreign about him returned now confusedly to Claudia's mind, although she could not associate it with any nationality familiar to her.

The stranger was emphatically not of their own class, but as obviously not of the underworld. Little as she knew of the dregs of humanity the girl had realized that in one startled glance. Where had he and her husband met before, and what was the nature of the grim bond between them?

Her husband! Claudia shuddered from head to foot, and the waves of alternate heat and cold which swept over her made her clench her hands and set her teeth. The Niles Hamersley whom she had known, the calm, inscrutable, magnetic personality which had so attracted her from the first and then carried her heart by storm in the swift, ardent flame of his wooing had vanished. Could it be that he had never existed save in her own infatuated eyes? His ring was on her finger, and she must bear his name as long as they both should live; but it was the ring and name of a stranger and one from whom she shrank in unutterable repulsion.

No thought of openly evading the issue entered her mind. For better or worse she was Niles Hamersley's wife in the eyes of the world at least, and so she must remain no matter what shadow hung over him. The step which she had taken that noon was indeed irrevocable, as Uncle Matt had

warned her. Why had he spoken in such solemn admonition even at the eleventh hour? If he had known or suspected the faintest cloud upon the character or reputation of the man she had chosen the marriage would never have been permitted to take place. Claudia knew well that the attorney, who had been a lifelong intimate of the family, was as jealous of its good name as he was solicitous for her happiness.

Had he really said all that he meant, there at the foot of the stairs? He asked if she were sure of herself, of her own mind and heart, but had he not rather intended to convey a suggestion of her confidence in the man to whom she was about to entrust herself? Aware of the exactitude of his legal mind, she realized that he would insinuate nothing based on mere unreasoning prejudice, and now in introspection the conviction was borne in upon her that he had never liked Niles.

When she sent for him and told him of her engagement he had taken the announcement quietly enough, without surprise and only an added seriousness, a deepened kindness in his paternal tones as he congratulated her. She had been too engrossed in her own happiness to note any lack of wholehearted cordiality in his attitude. Claudia could not recall that he had then or later made any reference either to Niles Hamersley himself or to the wisdom of her choice, and she wondered now that his reticence had escaped her. But surely he was the only one—

A swift stab of memory brought her bolt upright on the bed, her wavering hands at her throat. Stephen! Stephen Munson, her old playmate! What was it he had said? As plainly as though he stood before her, his words rang again in her ears: "There is something hidden and furtive about him—sinister, if you like. There is a shadow upon him! I feel it—here! It can bring you only suffering—tragedy!"

Had the idealistic dreamer been more psychic than she knew when she sent him from her in anger? Claudia sprang up and began pacing the floor as the gray day dimmed in a grayer twilight. The astute, hard-headed, practical lawyer, the boy with the flame of genius in his soul—what

had these two widely dissimilar natures been able to sense and feel which had been hidden from her?

All at once she paused and then crept softly to the door, for the bell had resounded through the house. Had he come to her to make his belated explanation? Had some one—that dreadful stranger, perhaps, brought news of him—news which would mean only an added blow?

The next moment she heard Uncle Matt's deep, concerned tones in the hall, and George's quavering ones delivering her message. So the hour had come and gone which was to have seen her started upon her wedding journey, the first step on the long road of happiness she had fondly believed lay before her! She drew in her breath with a dry, quivering sob and then listened intently once more. George was not good at dissembling, and she knew that the inexplicable event must have shaken him more even than it had Annie. Could she hope that he would be able to deceive the sharp-eyed, keen-witted attorney?

But there came the low, indistinguishable rumble of Uncle Matt's voice again, and then to her relief the dull thud of the closing front door. Whether he believed or not he had gone. She was to be left undisturbed to her tortured thoughts.

Twilight deepened to darkness and still Claudia paced the floor in agonizing conjecture. What was this secret which Niles had kept from her and from all the world? No doubt entered her mind but that he loved her. Whatever his nature held that was now so utterly strange and alien to her, he had wanted her for herself alone. The knowledge of this brought no tenderness, no softening of her outraged spirit but the memory of his eager, quickening kisses upon her eyes and lips and throat made her shudder with repulsion and loathing and she flung herself face downward upon her bed.

What sort of man was this whose name she bore? What had he done, of what unnameable thing was he guilty that that sly, evil-faced interloper had sufficient hold upon him to drag him away from his newly made wife under the eyes of all their world? Was it—crime

Claudia's very soul writhed at the thought. She, Claudia Langham, had been deceived, betrayed! Trustingly she had relinquished a proud and spotless name for one under a cloud of Heaven knew what iniquity and dishonor, and the man whom in love and unquestioning faith she had placed above all others had become her enemy! He had killed her love, dragged her faith and pride in the dust, made a mockery of all she held sacred!

No suggestion came to her mind that she might be misjudging him. Instinct which had slept so long was awake now, aroused by that unforgettable revelation of fear and guilt upon his face. Whether he had broken the law of God or man he had as surely sinned, and now he cowered and cringed before the retribution that had come.

Time passed unheeded by Claudia in the depths of her travail. She was aware that Annie tiptoed in unbidden at long intervals, first to remove the tray and exclaim softly over its untouched contents and again to cover her snugly and open the windows. The rain had ceased and the gentle night wind brought with it the clean, fresh odor of wet earth and dripping trees in the square. Now and then a car rolled past and the distant rumble of busses under the Arch came in a subdued monotone to her ears. Once a group of students from the art colony which lay to the south passed, singing the latest popular air. At length Annie came again, and this time she made no particular effort at silence, but lighted the low lamps determinedly and then advanced to the bed.

"Come, Miss Claudia! Goodness knows I hate to wake you, but it ain't right for you to lie there like that, with nothing a past your lips since morning. Do you know it's near midnight?" She drew down the coverlet and shook her mistress gently. "I've fixed a nice, hot supper for you, and it won't do any good to send me away. I won't stir a step till you've eaten it and I get you put to bed right."

Claudia protested, but in vain, and the sooner to rid herself of the unbearably solicitous presence of her old nurse, she forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls of food and

drink a cup of tea. Then passively she submitted to being prepared for the night.

Only twelve o'clock! There were hours and hours of darkness before her, but what would the dawn of the new day bring? Niles Hamersley would come to her as soon as he was at liberty to do so; she had no doubt of that, but what hideous fruit would the coming interview bear? If he were able to avert whatever danger of retribution or punishment hung over him, could he hope to blind her with specious excuses, cajole her into forgetfulness of that expression she had seen upon his face by renewed protestations of the love that was now a bestial thing in her sight? Claudia sickened at the thought, and when Annie had gone at last she rose and locked the door, with a glance at the little boudoir clock on the mantel.

Half past twelve! Where was he now? With the creature who shared his guilty knowledge or before his judges? If he had committed a crime in the eyes of the law, could that man have been a detective? Would the horrible, sordid facts be blazoned to the world on the morrow, shrieking in headlines in every newspaper in the city? Her blood chilled, but then a swift intuition reassured her on that score. That stranger might have been Niles Hamersley's accomplice—his associate in that act of the past—but he was no officer of the law. His own manner had been too furtive and stealthy, and overwrought as Claudia was, she realized that if Niles were sought by the police, his arrest would have been accomplished quietly in no such spectacular and melodramatic fashion.

Neither had the man been a victim of whatever Niles had done, for although he had conveyed a covert threat, his expression had been triumphant rather than vengeful. He held the whip hand and knew it, and his significant leer showed that he enjoyed with almost fiendish malice the situation which he had created.

No. Whatever this hideous thing was in Niles's past, it could not have been a crime which came under the statutes, or at least the authorities had not yet connected him with such an act, for he had made no attempt at concealment. Surely a man who

was "wanted," a man on whom the hand of the law might be laid at any moment, would not have lived as he had for the past two years at least, taking a prominent part in the social life of the most exclusive circles in the city and at the resorts where all the world gathered! His picture had been frequently in the papers in connection with various society sporting events, and the list of the clubs in town and country which had welcomed him to membership during the past two years.

A single, silvery chime had long since sounded from the little clock, but Claudia had not heard it, and now she sat crouched upon the bed with her arms clasped about her drawn-up knees, staring straight before her as a hitherto disregarded fact was borne in upon her consciousness.

Two years! Everything that she or her world actually knew about the man she had married dated back only to two years ago! Feverishly her mind raced back over the past. At the time of her debut there had been no Niles Hamersley on the social horizon, but later during the season casual references had been made to him by some of the older men as a coming financier and by the younger as a thoroughgoing sportsman. His money, his unquestionable breeding and knowledge of the world as well as his good looks had carried him far, but more than all it must have been that strangely compelling, magnetic personality of his that had so quickly won him a place in the unsuspecting innermost circles of a society which for the last generation had been growing more and more lax and tolerant of newcomers.

Claudia had met him first at a house party during that bewildering round of visits two summers ago. He had impressed her as being quite the most good looking man she had ever seen, but rather gravely aloof and dignified. It was only when he held her in his arms in their first dance together that she had felt consciously attracted to him. Somehow she had never forgotten that first dance, but during the brief, quickly passing weeks of that summer, although she seemed to encounter him everywhere, he had shown her no more attention than he paid to the other favored

débutantes of the season, seeming to prefer the society of the older, married set.

Then came her father's sudden death and her own social retirement. Beyond a brief conventional note of condolence she had heard nothing from Niles Hamersley for more than a year, although his name was frequently mentioned and he was never quite out of her thoughts.

A chance encounter a few months before when she was returning from the settlement work to which she had turned in her solitude, an invitation to tea, the delightful discovery of kindred tastes and a mutual interest in art and music—how quickly the renewed acquaintance had drifted into friendship and then infatuation!

Two o'clock! How still the house was! No slightest sound came in through the open windows and a brooding silence seemed to have settled down over all the world as though it kept vigil with her, waiting for the morrow and what it would bring forth.

Claudia longed for, yet dreaded, the dawn. Whatever Niles's secret, it was a shameful one; she had read that in his face as well as the fact that unexpected retribution had come. He had not trusted her—ah, if he only had! If only this thing which he had done were something which she could have forgiven, some terrible mistake which she might have helped him to rectify, the consequences of which she might have borne with him, proud to share his expiation! He knew that she loved him, and desiring her he had deliberately taken advantage of that love and of her lonely, unprotected state to make her his own, risking the chance that the black shadow of his past might roll up once more and engulf her as well as himself.

God, how she hated him! The knowledge of his treachery and deceit revealed him to her in a new and hateful light. From the man of her dreams he had become a monster of unknown depths of depravity, a creature unfit to live.

Why should he live? If his secret were a dishonorable one, as it must be, he had dishonored her in placing that ring upon her finger, making her one with him to endure this horror from a past in which she

had had no part. If there was any higher justice, why did not death take him now and free her from the shackles which he had forged? He had wronged her unspeakably that day, whatever his previous wrongdoing might have been, and if her father were alive, Claudia knew, even while she shrank from the thought, that the man who had dared to join his tarnished name to their unsullied one would not live to drag her down in his own infamy.

Her father! A passionate longing for his dear presence welled up within her, and for the first time since the shock of her disillusionment hot, stinging tears blinded her. To feel his protective arms about her, to hear his voice, see his face— On a sudden impulse she rose and drew on a robe, then taking a portable lamp from her dressing table she unlocked the door softly.

A gentle snore greeted her and in the dim light she saw Annie huddled in a chair, a shapeless, most unlovely figure wrapped in a rug, with wisps of gray hair falling over her wrinkled, witchlike face. As the girl regarded her, her aching heart warmed. Dear, faithful old soul! With old George, helpless hut loyal, and Matthew Rowe's advice and friendship to lean upon if open scandal and disgrace should come, she was not utterly alone and forsaken!

Stepping noiselessly past the sleeper, Claudia crossed the hall and opened another, seldom used door to find herself in a huge, somberly furnished bedroom scrupulously clean, hut with the unmistakable atmosphere of being long untenanted. Over the mantel there hung a painting of a young woman seated in a chair and a man posed stiffly behind her. The woman's dress was that of the middle nineties, but her face might have been that of a girl who stood gazing yearningly on them both.

Did her father and mother know the horror which had come into her life? Did they know that she was linked irrevocably with a man of whom she knew nothing except that he was under some fearful cloud and that unless exposure came she must take her place beside him, his wife in name if not in fact? Even though his past were laid bare to the world, she would still be his wife. Why must she endure the future

which stretched before her? Why could she not die and go to her father and mother? They, at least, would understand, for she had often heard her father express the conviction that, coming into the world without volition, it was one's privilege to remove one's self from it.

Fascinated, the impulse took root in Claudia's half distraught brain. As a deep toned clock sounded three muffled, solemn strokes from below she turned and stumbled blindly to her father's desk. It was a shabby affair, relegated here from the study when he had refused to part with it. Now as she turned the rusty key and opened it, a little cloud of dust from decayed, crumbling papers arose chokingly. She pushed the papers aside and her sure fingers found and pressed the spring which opened a concealed drawer.

There lay her father's revolver, together with the box of cartridges and bit of oil-soaked waste. Claudia placed the lamp beside her and taking up the revolver with feverish haste she cleaned and loaded it, then thrust it into the bosom of her robe. With a last deprecating glance at the pictured faces, as though for approval, she slipped noiselessly from the room. She would wait until Niles Hammersley came to her, until she could wring the truth from him, and then if it meant a hopeless future she would know what to do.

The thought of her own room, with Annie presently to awaken outside and hover maddeningly about her, was unendurable. If there were only some forgotten nook or corner—

The cupola! It was there she had taken all her childish griefs and perplexities since first her small feet had been able to negotiate the ladderlike stairs leading up from the huge, dusty attic which covered all the top of the house. The cupola, scarcely fifteen feet square and rising like a low tower from the center of the roof, had proved a splendid playroom too, and here most of her earlier treasures were still gathered. She had not visited this childhood sanctuary for years, but now her eager feet sought the stairs. On the floor above she went silently past the sealed room directly over her

own and to the short staircase at the rear that led to the attic.

It was evident that, left to superannuated hands, the house was not as well looked after as she had imagined, for the attic must have been long unvisited. Dust rose blindingly, stiflingly before her with each step, and in the faint rays of her lamp it lay everywhere like a velvety gray mantle. Unthinkingly, Claudia was advancing straight toward the flight of steps leading to the cupola when directly above that sealed room she felt a treacherous board give way beneath her weight. Hurriedly she retreated to where she remembered a stout beam supported the rotten flooring. It had always been unsafe in spots even for her weight as a child, but she had learned to pick her way in a roundabout fashion to the cupola steps. Now she followed the same path.

The small high chamber was more thickly overlaid with dust even than the attic below, but the air was less musty, for a broken window pane admitted the cool night breeze. The sight of the dolls seated in a patient, dejected row against the opposite wall brought a little reminiscent smile.

The revolver lay like a cold, dead weight against her breast, and she placed it on the miniature tea table which occupied the center of the floor, then curled herself up in a corner with the lamp beside her and absently took up the largest of the dolls. A merciful lethargy was stealing over her bruised spirit, and the events of yesterday seemed like a dream.

Had she really stood beside Niles Hammersley at the altar of that brilliantly thronged church? Had that evil looking stranger actually sprung from nowhere to take him from her, or was he too part of this nightmare from which she would soon awaken? The coming day and what it would bring seemed all at once of less vital importance. As the east lightened, her head drooped lower and lower until it rested gently on her breast.

It was thus that hours later, after a frantic search, old Annie found her with the broad sunlight turning her hair to gold and the dusty doll cradled in her arms.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Face *in the* Abyss.

By A. MERRITT

Author of "The Moon Pool," "The Metal Monster," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

AND now the readers of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY come once again to their old favorite, A. Merritt, who flashed like a shooting star across the pages of *All-Story Weekly* in the issues of June 22, 1918, and from February 1, to March 22, 1919, illuminating that most classically fantastic of all stories, THE MOON POOL, which was afterward brought out in book form and accepted in England, France, and America as equal to the best imaginative work of H. G. Wells or that older master, the late Jules Verne; after which he rose to greater heights in his serial that appeared under the title of THE METAL MONSTER.

In these two works Merritt struck an entirely new note, rich in imagination, the wondrous possibilities of science, and the fine balance of human interest and narrative charm. In every chapter he struck the cosmic chords of superlative invention. Letters from all over the world asking for further work from the pen of Merritt came to this office.

He has recently been induced, or, to be perfectly frank, he has again taken up his pen of his own volition and made another contribution entitled THE FACE IN THE ABYSS, which is published in this issue in full on the pages which follow.

We know of no more kaleidoscopic imagination among living writers. Merritt possesses not only a transcendental vision but the power to put in words the scenes that unfold and come full winged shimmering with light from the cathedral of his mind.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE HAUNTED HILLS.

IT has been just three years since I met Nicholas Graydon in the little Andean village of Chupan, high on the eastern slopes of the Peruvian uplands. I had stopped there to renew my supplies, expecting to stay not more than a day or two. But after my *arrieros* had unlimbered my luggage from the two burros, and I entered the unusually clean and commodious *posada*, its keeper told me that another North American was stopping there.

He would be very glad to see me, said the innkeeper, since he was very ill and there was no other *Americanos* in the hamlet. Yes, he was so ill that he was, to tell me all the truth, certain to die, and it would beyond doubt comfort him much to have a fellow countryman with him when that sad moment came. That is, he added, if he were able to recognize a fellow countryman, since all the time the *señor* had been at the *posada* he had been out of his mind with fever, and would probably pass away so.

Then with a curiously intense anxiety he implored me to stay on until death did come; a matter, he assured me, that could be one of only a few days—maybe hours.

I bluntly asked him whether his desire for me to remain was through solicitude for my ailing countryman or through fear for himself. And after a little hesitation he answered that it was both. The *señor* had come to the village a week before, with one burro and neither guides nor *arrieros*. He had been very weak, as though from privations and long journeying. But weaker far from a wound on his neck which had become badly infected. The wound seemed to have been made by either an arrow or a spear. The *señor* had been taken care of as well as the limited knowledge of the *cura* and himself permitted. His burro had been looked after and his saddlebags kept scrupulously closed. But I could understand that questions might be raised after the *señor's* death. If I remained I could report to the authorities that everything possible had been done for the *señor's* comfort and testify that none in Chupan was responsible for his injuries.

This did not sound very convincing to me, and I said so. Then the worthy innkeeper revealed what actually was in his mind. The *señor*, he said, had spoken in his ravings, of dreadful things, things both accursed and devilish. What were they? Well—he crossed himself—if I remained I would no doubt hear for myself. But they had even greatly disturbed the good *cura*, despite that he was under the direct protection of God. The *señor* had come, so his ravings indicated, from a haunted place—no less a place, the innkeeper whispered crossing himself again, than the shunned Cordillera de Carabaya, which every one knew was filled with evil spirits. Yes, evil spirits which would not lightly give up any one who had once been in their power!

And, in fine, the idea seemed to be that some of these demons of the Cordillera—about which, as a matter of fact, I had heard some strange tales—might come at any time for the sick man. If they did, they would be more apt to wreak their fury on one of the *señor's* own countrymen—especially if he was in the same room. The keeper of the *posada* did not put it that way, of course; he said that one of his own people was better qualified to protect the *señor* in such case than any strangers were. Nevertheless the theory plainly was that if I stayed I would act as a lightning rod for any levin of hell that might strike!

I went to the room of the sick man. At first glance I could see that here was no *anderine*, no mountain vagabond. Neither fever nor scrub beard could hide the fineness, the sensitivity, the intelligence of the face on which I looked. He was, I judged, about thirty, and he was in ill case indeed. His temperature showed 105 point 6. At the moment he was in delirium.

My first shock of surprise came when I examined his wound. It seemed to me more like the stab of some great bird beak than the work of spear or arrow. It was a puncture—or better, perhaps, a punch—clear through the muscles of the back and left shoulder and base of the neck. It had missed the arteries of the last by the narrowest of margins. I knew of no bird which could make such a wound as this, yet the closer I looked and probed the more sure

I was that it had been inflicted by no weapon of man.

That night, after I had arranged my own matters and had him sleeping under a hypodermic, I opened up his saddlebags. Papers in them showed his name to be Nicholas Graydon, a mining engineer, a graduate of the Harvard School of Mines, his birthplace, Philadelphia. There was a diary that revealed so much of him truly likable that had I not already made up my mind to stop on with him it would have impelled me to do so. Its last entry was about a month before and ran:

Two weeks now since our *arrieros* deserted us, and we seem to be pretty thoroughly lost. Effects upon the three are curious. Sterrett manages to keep himself evenly drunk all the time. That spare burro of his must be loaded with nothing but that Indian hell-brew. Dancre is moody and sullen. Soames seems to have developed a morbid suspicion of all of us. Strange how the wilderness, the jungle, the desert, bring out the latent man in all of us. In Quito none of the three was half bad. But now—well, the luckiest thing for me will be for us to find no treasure. If we do, my throat will probably be the first to be cut.

Further down in the bag were two parcels, each most carefully and securely wrapped. Opening the first I found a long black feather oddly marked with white. I did not recognize the plume as belonging to any bird I knew. Its shaft was inlaid with little bands of gold, altogether a curiously delicate bit of goldsmith's work.

But the contents of the second package made me gasp with amazement. It was a golden bracelet, clearly exceedingly ancient, the band an inch broad and expanding into an oval disk perhaps three inches long by two wide. That disk held in high relief the most extraordinary bit of carving I had ever seen. Four monsters held on uplifted paws, a bowl on which lay coiled a serpent with a woman's face and woman's breasts. Nor had I ever beheld such suggestion of united wisdom and weirdness as the maker had stamped upon the snake woman's face.

Yet it was not that which called forth the full measure of my wonder; no. There are certain pictures, certain sculptures, certain works of art which carry to their beholders conviction that no fantasy, no im-

agination, went into their making and that they are careful, accurate copies of something seer by those who made them. This bit of golden carving carried that conviction.

The four monsters which held up the snake woman were—dinosaurs!

There was no mistaking them. I had examined too many of the reconstructions made by scientists from the fossil bones of these gigantic, monstrous reptilian creatures to be in error. But these giants were supposed to have died off millions of years before man first appeared on earth! Yet here they were, carved with such fidelity to detail, such impress of photographic accuracy, that it was impossible to believe that the ancient goldsmith who made this thing had not had before him living models!

Marveling, I held the bracelet closer to the light and as I did so I thought I heard far away in the blackness of the mountains and high in air a sound like a tiny bugle. In that note was something profoundly, alienly weird. I went to the window and listened, but the sound did not come again. I turned to find the eyes of Graydon opened and regarding me. For a moment he had slipped from the thrall of the fever—and the thought came to me that it had been that elfin bugling which had awakened him.

It was six weeks before I had Graydon well out of danger. And in that time he had told me bit by bit that well nigh incredible experience of his in the haunted hills of the Cordillera de Carabaya and what it was that had sent him so far down into the valley of the shadow.

Three years it has been since then. Three years and I have heard nothing of him. Three years and he has not returned from his journey back to the Cordillera de Carabaya where he went to seek mystery, ancient beyond all memory of man, he believed was hidden there. But more than that—to seek Suarra.

"If you don't hear from me in three years, tell the story and let the people who knew me know what became of me," he said, as I left him at the beginning of that strange trail he had determined to retrace.

And so I tell it, reconstructing it from his reticences as well as his confidences,

since only so may a full measure of judgment of that story be gained.

CHAPTER II.

SUARRA OF THE GOLDEN SPEARS.

GRAYDON had run into Sterrett in Quito. Or, rather, Sterrett sought him out there. Graydon had often heard of the giant West Coast adventurer, but their trails had never crossed. It was with a lively curiosity, then, that he opened the door of his room to this visitor.

And he had rather liked Sterrett. There was a bluff directness about the big man that made him overlook a certain cruelty of eye and a touch of brutality about mouth and jaw.

Sterrett came to the point at once. Graydon had no doubt heard the story of the treasure train which had been bringing to Pizarro the ransom of the Inca Atahualpa? And learning of the murder of that monarch had turned back and buried that treasure somewhere in the Peruvian wilderness? Graydon had heard of it, hundreds of times. And, like every other adventurer in the Andes, spent a little time himself searching for those countless millions in jewels and gold.

Sterrett nodded.

"I know how to find it," he said.

And Graydon had laughed. How many had told him that they, too, knew where lay hidden the hoard of Atahualpa the Inca!

But in the end Sterrett convinced him; convinced him at least that there was something more solid than usual in his story, something decidedly worth looking into.

There would be two others in the expedition, Sterrett told him, both men long associated with him. One was Dancre, a Frenchman, the other an American named Soames. These two had been with Sterrett when he had got hold of the old parchment with its alleged map of the treasure trail, and with its carefully drawn signs that purported to be copies of those along that trail; signs cut by its makers to guide those who one day, when the Spaniard was gone, would set out to recover the hidden hoard.

Graydon asked why they wanted him. Sterrett bluntly enough told him—because he was an American; because they knew he could be trusted; because he could afford to pay half the expenses of the expedition. He, Dancre and Soames would pay the other half. They would all share equally if the treasure was found. Still another reason, Graydon was a mining engineer and his special knowledge might be essential when it came to recovering the stuff. Furthermore, if the treasure was not found, the region where they were going was full of minerals. He might make some valuable discoveries. In which event all would share equally as before.

There were no calls on Graydon at the time. It was true that he could well afford the cost. At the worst there would be adventure and some pleasant excitement. He met Dancre and Soames, the first a cynical, but amusing little bunch of wires and nerves, the second a lanky, saturnine, hard-bitten Yankee. They had gone down by rail to Cerro de Pasco for their outfit, that being the town of any size closest to where, according to the map, their trail into the wilderness began. A week later, with eight burros and six *arrieros* or packmen, they were well within the welter of peaks through which the old map indicated their road lay.

They found the signs cut in the rocks exactly as the parchment had promised. Gay, spirits high with anticipation, three of them at least spending in advance their share of the treasure, they followed the symbols. Steadily they were led into the uncharted wilderness.

At last the *arrieros* began to murmur. They were approaching, they said, a region that was accursed, the Cordillera de Carabaya, where demons dwelt and only fierce Aymaras, their servants, lived. Promises of more money, threats, pleadings, took them along a little farther.

Then one morning the four awoke to find the *arrieros* gone—and with them half the burros and a portion of their supplies.

They pressed on. Then suddenly, the signs had failed them. Either they had lost the trail, or there were no more carven symbols and the parchment which had led them truthfully so far had lied at the last.

Or was it possible that the signs had been obliterated—cut away?

The country into which they had penetrated was a strangely deserted one. They saw no sign of Indians—had seen none indeed since when, more than a week before, they had stopped at a Quicha village and Sterrett had got mad drunk on that fiery spirit the Quichas distill. Food, too, was curiously hard to find, there were few animals and fewer birds.

But worst of all was the change that had come over his companions. As high as they had been lifted by their certainty of success, just so deep were they now cast into despair. The wilderness, the loneliness of it, their disappointment, had brought out the real man that lies hidden beneath the veneer we all of us carry. Sterrett kept himself at a steady level of drunkenness, alternately quarrelsome and noisy or sunk in a sullen mood of brooding, brutal rage. Dancré had become silent and irritable. Soames seemed to have reached the conclusion that Graydon, Sterrett and the Frenchman had combined against him; that they had either deliberately missed the trail or had erased the signs. Only when the two of them joined Sterrett and drank with him the Quicha hell-brew did either of them relax. At such times Graydon had the uneasy feeling that they were holding the failure against him and that his life might be hanging on a thin thread.

On the day that his adventure really began—that strange adventure to which all that had passed before had been prelude—Graydon was coming back to the camp. He had been hunting since morning. Dancré and Soames had gone off together on another desperate search for the missing symbols that would lead them to the treasure trail again.

Cut off in mid-flight, the girl's cry came to him as the answer to all his apprehensions; materialization of the menace toward which his vague fears had been groping ever since he had left Sterrett alone at the camp hours ago. He had sensed some culminating misfortune close—and here it was! He knew it; how, he did not stop himself to ask; he was sure. He broke into a run, stumbling up the slope to the

group of gray green *algarroba* trees where the tent was pitched.

What had the drunken fool done? Graydon had warned them all that their situation was perilous; that if Indians came they must try to make friends with them—that they must be superlatively careful in their treatment of any Indian women.

He reached the *algarrobas*; crashed through the light undergrowth to the little clearing. Why didn't the girl cry out again, he wondered. There was a sickness at his heart. A low chuckle reached him, thick, satyr toned. Then Sterrett's voice, cruel, mocking!

"No more fight in you, eh? Well, which'll it be, pretty lady—the way to the gold or you? And by Heaven—I guess it'll be you—first!"

For an instant Graydon paused. He saw that Sterrett, half crouching, was holding the girl bow fashion over one knee. A thick arm was clinched about her neck, the fingers clutching her mouth brutally, silencing her; his right hand fettered her slender wrists; her knees were caught in the vise of his bent right leg.

She was helpless, but as Graydon sprang forward he caught a flash of wide black eyes, wrath filled and defiant, staring fearlessly into those leering so close.

He caught Sterrett by the hair, locked an arm under his chin, drawing his head sharply back.

"Drop her!" he ordered. "Drop her—quick!"

Sterrett hurled himself to his feet, dropping the girl as he rose.

"What the hell are you butting in for?" he snarled. His hand struck down toward his pistol. But even while the fingers were tightening around the butt, Graydon's fist shot out and caught him on the point of the hairy jaw. The clutching fingers loosened, the half drawn pistol slipped to the ground, the great body quivered and toppled over. Long before it fell the girl had leaped up and away.

Graydon did not look after her. She had gone no doubt to bring down upon them her people, some tribe of those fierce Aymaras that even the Incas of old had never quite conquered and who would

avenge her—in ways that Graydon did not like to visualize.

He bent down over Sterrett. His heart was beating; feebly it was true—but beating. The reek of drink was sickening. Graydon's hand touched the fallen pistol. He picked it up and looked speculatively at the fallen man's rifle. Sterrett, between the blow and the drink, would probably be out of the running for hours. He wished that Dancre and Soames would get back soon to camp. The three of them could put up a good fight at any rate; might even have a chance for escape. So ran his thoughts. But Dancre and Soames would have to return quickly. The girl would soon be there—with the avengers; no doubt at this very moment she was telling them of her wrongs. He turned—

She stood there; looking at him!

And drinking in her loveliness, Graydon forgot the man at his feet; forgot all, and was content to let his soul sit undisturbed within his eyes and take its delight to her.

Her skin was palest ivory. It gleamed translucent through the rents of the soft amber fabric like the thickest silk that swathed her. Her eyes were deep velvety pools, oval, a little tilted; Egyptian in the wide midnight of their irises. But the features were classic, cameo; the nose small and straight, the brows level and black, almost meeting above it! And her hair was cloudy jet, misty and shadowed, and a narrow fillet of gold bound the broad, low forehead. In it like a diamond were entwined the sable and silver feathers of the *caraquenque*, that bird whose plumage in lost centuries was sacred to the princesses of the Incas alone. Above her dimpled elbows golden bracelets twined, reaching to the slender shoulders. The little, high arched feet were shod with high buskins of deerskin.

She was light and slender as the Willow Maid who waits on Kwannon when she passes into the World of Trees to pour into them new fire of green life—and like the Willow Maid green fire of tree and jungle and flame of woman gleamed within her.

Nothing so exquisite, so beautiful had ever Graydon beheld. Here was no Aymara, no daughter of any tribe of the Cordilleras, no descendant of Incas. Nor

was she Spanish. There were bruises on her cheeks—the marks of Sterrett's cruel fingers. Her long, slim hands touched them. The red lips opened. She spoke—in the Aymara tongue.

"Is he dead?" she asked—her voice was low, a faint chime as of little bells ringing through it.

"No," Graydon answered.

In the depths of the midnight eyes a small hot flame flared; he could have sworn it was of gladness; it vanished as swiftly as it had come.

"That is well," she said. "I would not have him die—" the voice became meditative—"so!"

"Who are you?" Graydon asked wonderingly. She looked at him for a long moment, enigmatically.

"Call me—Suarra," she answered at last.

Sterrett stirred; groaned. The girl gazed down upon him. The slim hand touched once more the bruises on her cheek.

"He is very strong," she murmured.

Graydon thought there was admiration in the voice; wondered whether all that delectable beauty was after all but a mask for primitive woman, worshipping brute strength; looked into the eyes scanning Sterrett's bulk, noted the curious speculation within them, and knew that whatever the reason for her comment it was not that which his fleeting thought had whispered. She looked at him, questioningly.

"Are you his enemy?" she asked.

"No," said Graydon, "we travel together."

"Then why," she pointed to the outstretched figure, "why did you do this to him? Why did you not let him have his way with me?"

Graydon flushed, uncomfortably. The question, with all its subtle implications, cut. What kind of a beast did she think him? His defense of her had been elementary—as well be asked to explain why he did not stand by and watch idly while a child was being murdered!

"What do you think I am?" His voice shook with half-shamed wrath. "No man stands by and lets a thing like that go on."

She looked at him, curiously; but her eyes had softened.

"No?" she asked. "No man does? Then what is he?"

Graydon found no answer. She took a step closer to him, her slim fingers again touching the bruises on her cheek.

"Do you not wonder," she said—"now do you not wonder why I do not call my people to deal him the punishment he has earned?"

"I do wonder," Graydon's perplexity was frank. "I wonder indeed. Why do you not call them—if they are close enough to hear?"

"And what would you do were they to come?" she whispered.

"I would not let them have him—alive," he answered. "Nor me!"

"Perhaps," she said, slowly, "perhaps—knowing that—is why—I do not call them!"

Suddenly she smiled upon him—and it was as though a draft of wild sweet wine had been lifted to his lips. He took a swift step toward her. She drew up to her slim lithe height, thrust out a warning hand.

"I am—Suarra," she said; then, "and I am—Death!"

And odd chill passed through Graydon. Again he realized the unfamiliar, the alien beauty of her. Was there truth after all in those legends of the haunted Cordillera? He had never doubted that there was something behind the terror of the Indians, the desertion of the *arrieros*. Was she one of its spirits, its—demons? For an instant the fantasy seemed no fantasy. Then reason returned. This girl a demon! He laughed.

She frowned at that laughter.

"Do not laugh," she said. "The death I mean is not such as you who live beyond the high rim of our land may know. It is death that blots out not alone the body, but that lord whose castle is the body; that which looks out through the windows of your eyes—that presence, that flame, you believe can never die. That, too, our death blots out; makes as though it never had been. Or letting it live, changes it in—dreadful—ways. Yet, because you came to me in my need—nay, more because of something I sense within you—something that calls out to me and to which I must listen and do desire to listen—because of this I would not have that death come to you."

Strange as were her words, Graydon hardly heard them; certainly did not then realize fully their meaning, lost still as he was in wonder.

What was this girl doing here in these wild mountains with her bracelets of gold and the royal Inca feathers on her lovely little head? No demon of the wilderness, she! Absurd! She was living, desirable, all human.

Yet she was of no race he knew. Despite the *caraquénque* plumes—not of the Incas.

But she was of pure blood—the blood of kings. Yes, that was it—a princess of some proud empire, immemorially ancient, long lost! But what empire?

"How you came by the watchers, I do not know. How you passed unseen by them I do not know. Nor how you came so far within this forbidden land. Tell me," her voice was imperious, "why came you here at all?"

Graydon stirred. It was a command.

"We came from afar," he said, "on the track of a great treasure of gold and gems; the treasure of Atahualpa, the Inca. There were certain signs that led us. They brought us here. And here we lost them. And found soon that we, too, were lost."

"Atahualpa," she nodded. "Yes, his people did come here. We took them—and their treasure!"

Graydon stared at her, jaw dropping in amazement.

"You—you took them—and the treasure!" he gasped.

"Yes," she nodded, indifferently, "it lies somewhere in one of the thirteen caves. It was nothing to us—to us of Yu-Atlanchi where treasures are as the sands in the stream bed. A grain of sand, it was, among many. But the people of Atahualpa were welcome—since we needed new folks to care for the Xinli and to feed the wisdom of the Snake Mother."

"The Snake Mother!" exclaimed Graydon.

The girl touched the bracelet on her right arm. And Graydon, looking close, saw that this bracelet held a disk on which was carved a serpent with a woman's head and woman's breasts and arms. It lav

coiled upon a great dish held high on the paws of four animals. The shapes of these did not at once register upon his consciousness—so absorbed was he in his study of that coiled figure.

And now he saw that this face was not really that of a woman. It was reptilian. But so strongly had the maker feminized it, so great was the suggestion of womanhood modeled into every line of it, that constantly the eyes saw it as woman, forgetting all that was of the serpent.

Her eyes were of some small, glittering, intensely purple stone. And as Graydon looked he felt that those eyes were alive—that far, far away some living thing was looking at him through them. That they were, in fact, prolongations of some one's—some *thing's*—vision!

And suddenly the figure seemed to swell, the coils to move, the eyes come closer.

He tore his gaze away; drew back, dizzily.

The girl was touching one of the animals that held up the bowl or shield or whatever it was that held the snake woman.

"The Xinli," she said.

Graydon looked; looked and felt increase of bewilderment. For he knew what those animals were. And, knowing, knew that he looked upon the incredible.

They were dinosaurs! Those gigantic, monstrous grotesques that ruled earth millions upon millions of years ago, and but for whose extinction, so he had been taught, man could never have developed.

Who in this Andean wilderness could know or could have known the dinosaur? Who here could have carved the monsters with such life-like detail as these possessed? Why, it was only yesterday that science had learned what really were their huge bones, buried so long that the rocks had molded themselves around them in adamantine matrix. And laboriously, with every modern resource still haltingly and laboriously, science had set those bones together as a perplexed child a picture puzzle, and timidly put forth what it believed to be reconstructions of these long vanished chimeras of earth's nightmare youth.

Yet here, far from all science it must surely be, some one had modeled those

same monsters for a woman's bracelet. Why then, it followed that whoever had done this must have had before him the living forms from which to work. Or, if not, copies of those forms set down accurately by ancient men who had seen them. And either or both these things were incredible.

What were these people to whom this girl belonged? People who—what was it she had said—could blot out both body and soul or change the soul to some dreadful thing? There had been a name—

Yu-Atlanchi.

"Suarra," he said, "where is Yu-Atlanchi? Is it this place where we are now?"

"This," she laughed. "No! Yu-Atlanchi is the ancient land. The hidden land where the Five Lords and the Lord of Lords once ruled, and where now rules only the Lord of Fate and the Lord of Folly and the Snake Mother! This place Yu-Atlanchi!" again she laughed. "Now and then we hunt here—with the Xinli and the—the—" she hesitated, looking at him oddly; then went on. "So it was that he," she pointed to Sterrett, "caught me. I was hunting. I had slipped away from my—my—" again she hesitated, as oddly as before—"my followers, for sometimes I would hunt alone, wander alone. I came through these trees and saw your *tetuane*, your lodge. I came face to face with—him. And I was amazed—too amazed to strike with one of these." She pointed to a low knoll a few feet away—"so, before I could conquer that amaze he seized me, choked me. And then you came."

Graydon stared at the place where she had pointed. There upon the ground lay three slender shining spears. Their slim shafts were of gold; the arrow shaped heads of two of them were of fine opal.

But the third—the third was a single emerald, translucent and flawless, all of six inches long and three at its widest and ground to keenest point and cutting edge!

There it lay, a priceless jewel tipping a spear of gold—and a swift panic shook Graydon. He had forgotten Soames and Dancre! Suppose they should return while this girl was there! This girl with her ornaments of gold, her gem tipped golden spears, and her—beauty! Well, he knew

what they could do. And while now he knew, too, how with all his wit and strength he would fight for her. Still they were two and armed and cunning, and he only one.

Suddenly he discounted all that tale of hers of a hidden land with its Lords and Snake Mother and its people who dealt out mysterious unfamiliar deaths. If this were all so, why had she come alone into the *algarrobas*? Why was she still alone? As suddenly he saw her only a girl, speaking fantasy, and helpless.

"Suarra," he said, "you must go and go quickly. This man and I are not all. There are two more and even now they may be close. Take your spears, and go quickly. Else I may not be able to save you."

"You think I am—" she began.

"I tell you to go," he answered. "Whoever you are, whatever you are, go now and keep away from this place. To-morrow I will try to lead them back. If you have people to fight for you—well, let them come and fight if you so desire. But take this instant your spears and go."

She crossed to the little knoll and slowly picked them up. She held one out to him, the one that bore the emerald point.

"This," she said, "to remember—Suarra."

"No," he thrust it back. "No!"

Once the others saw that jewel never, he knew, would he be able to start them on the back trail—if they could find it. Sterrett had seen it, of course, but that was not like having it in the camp, a constant reminder to Soames and Dancre of what might be unlimited riches within their reach. And he might be able to convince those others that Sterrett's story was but a drunken dream.

The girl regarded him meditatively, a quickened interest in the velvety eyes. She slipped the golden bracelets from her arms, held them out to him with the three spears.

"Will you take all of them—and leave your comrades?" she asked. "Here are gold and gems. They are treasures. They are what you have been seeking. Take them. Take them and go, leaving that man there and those other two. Consent—

and I will not only give you these, but show you a way out of this forbidden land."

For a moment Graydon hesitated. The great emerald alone was worth a fortune. What loyalty did he owe after all, to Sterrett and Soames and Dancre? And Sterrett had brought this thing upon himself.

Nevertheless—they were his comrades. Open eyed he had gone into this venture with them.

He had a swift vision of himself skulking away with this glittering, golden booty, creeping off to safety while he left them, unwarned, unprepared to meet—what? Peril, certainly; nay, almost as certainly—death. For whatever the present danger of this girl might be at the hands of his comrades, subconsciously Graydon knew that it must be but a brief one; that she could not be all alone; that although through some chance she had strayed upon the camp, somewhere close were those who would seek for her when they missed her. That somewhere were forces on which she could call and against which it was unlikely three men, even well armed as they were, could prevail.

Very definitely he did not like that picture of himself skulking away from the peril, whatever it might be.

"No," he said. "These men are of my race, my comrades. Whatever is to come—I will meet it with them and help them fight it. Now go."

"Yet you would have fought them for my sake—indeed did fight," she said, as though perplexed. "Why then do you cling to them when you can save yourself; go free, with treasure? And why, if you will not do this, do you let me go, knowing that if you kept me prisoner, or—slew me, I could not bring my people down upon you?"

Graydon laughed.

"I couldn't let them hurt you, of course," he said, "and I'm afraid to make you prisoner, because I might not be able to keep you free from hurt. And I won't run away. So talk no more, but go—go!"

She thrust the gleaming spears into the ground, slipped the golden bracelets back on her arms, held white hands out to him.

"Now," she cried, "now, by the Wisdom of the Snake Mother, by the Five Lords and by the Lord of Lords, I will save you if I can. All that I have tempted you with was but to test that truth which I had hoped was in you and now know is within you. Now you may not go back—nor may they. Here is Yu-Atlanchi and Yu-Atlanchi's power. Into that power you have strayed. Nor have those who have ever so strayed ever escaped. Yet you I will save—if I can!"

Before he could answer her he heard a horn sound; far away and high in air it seemed. Faintly it was answered by others closer by; mellow, questing notes—yet with weirdly alien beat in them that subtly checked the pulse of Graydon's heart!

"They come," she said. "My followers! Light your fire to-night. Sleep without fear. But do not wander beyond these trees!"

"Suarra—" he cried.

"Silence now," she warned. "Silence—until I am gone!"

The mellow horns sounded closer. She sprang from his side; darted through the trees.

From the little ridge above the camp he heard her voice raised in one clear, ringing shout. There was a tumult of the horns about her—elfinly troubling. Then silence.

Graydon stood listening. The sun touched the high snowfields of the majestic peaks toward which he faced; touched them and turned them into robes of molten gold. The amethyst shadows that draped their sides thickened, wavered and marched swiftly forward.

Still he listened, scarce breathing.

Far, far away the horns sounded again; faint echoings of the tumult that had swept about Suarra—faint, faint and faerie sweet.

The sun dropped behind the peaks; the edges of their frozen mantles glittered as though sewn with diamonds; darkened into a fringe of gleaming rubies. The golden fields dulled, grew amber and then blushed forth a glowing rose. They changed to pearl and faded into a ghostly silver, shining like cloud wraiths in the highest heavens. Down upon the *algarroba* clump the quick Andean dusk fell.

And not till then did Graydon, shivering with sudden, inexplicable dread, realize that beyond the calling horns and the girl's clear shouting he had heard no other sound—no noise either of man or beast, no sweeping through of brush or grass, no fall of running feet nor clamor of the chase.

Nothing but that mellow chorus of the horns!

From infinite distances, it seemed to him, he heard one single note, sustained and insistent. It detached itself from the silence. It swept toward him with the speed of light. It circled overhead, hovered and darted; arose and sped away; a winged sound bearing some message, carrying some warning—where?

CHAPTER III.

THE EYES OF THE SNAKE MOTHER.

GRAYDON turned back. He bent over Sterrett who had drifted out of the paralysis of the blow into a drunken stupor. There were deep scratches on the giant's cheeks—the marks of Suarra's nails. The jaw was badly swollen where he had hit it. Graydon dragged him over to the tent, thrust a knapsack under his head and threw a blanket over him. Then he went out and built up the fire.

Hardly had he begun to prepare the supper when he heard a trampling through the underbrush. Soon Soames and Dancre came up through the trees.

"Find any signs?" he asked them.

"Signs? Hell—no!" snarled the New Englander. "Say, Graydon, did you hear something like a lot of horns? Damned queer horns, too. They seemed to be over here."

Graydon nodded, abstractedly. Abruptly he realized that he must tell these men what had happened, must warn them and urge them to prepare for defense. But how much should he tell?

All?

Tell them of Suarra's beauty, of her golden ornaments and her gem tipped spears of gold? Tell them what she had said of Atahualpa's treasure and of that ancient Yu-Atlanchi where priceless gems were

"thick as the sands upon the bed of a stream?"

Well he knew that if he did there would be no further reasoning with them; that they would go berserk with greed. Yet something of it he must tell them if they were to be ready for that assault which he was certain would come with the dawn.

And of Suarra they would learn soon enough from Sterrett when he awakened.

He heard an exclamation from Dancré who had passed on into the tent; heard him come out; stood up and faced the wiry little Frenchman.

"What's the matter wit' Sterrett, eh?" Dancré snapped. "First I thought he's drunk. Then I see he's scratched like wild cat and wit' a lump on his jaw as big as one orange. What you do to Sterrett, eh?"

Graydon had made up his mind; was ready to answer.

"Dancré," he said, "Soames—we're in a bad box. I came in from hunting less than an hour ago and found Sterrett wrestling with a girl. That's bad medicine down here—the worst, and you two know it. I had to knock Sterrett out before I could get the girl away from him. Her people will probably be after us in the morning. There's no use trying to get away. They'll soon enough find us in this wilderness of which we know nothing and they presumably know all. This place is as good as any other to meet them. And it's a better place than any if we have to fight. We'd better spend the night getting it ready so we can put up a good one, if we have to."

"A girl, eh?" said Dancré. "What she look like? Where she come from? How she get away?"

Graydon choose the last question to answer.

"I let her go," he said.

"You let her go!" snarled Soames. "What the hell did you do that for, man? Why didn't you tie her up? We could have held her as a hostage, Graydon—had something to do some trading with when her damned bunch of Indians came."

"She wasn't an Indian, Soames," began Graydon, then hesitated.

"You mean she was white—Spanish?" broke in Dancré, incredulously.

"No, not Spanish either. She was white. Yes, white as any of us. I don't know what she was," answered Graydon.

The pair stared at him, then at each other.

"There's something damned funny about this," growled Soames, at last. "But what I want to know is why you let her go, whatever the hell she was?"

"Because I thought we'd have a better chance if I did than if I didn't." Graydon's own wrath was rising. "I want to tell you two that we're up against something mighty bad; something none of us knows anything about. And we've got just once chance of getting out of the mess. If I'd kept her here we wouldn't have even that chance."

He halted. Dancré had stooped; had picked up something from the ground, something that gleamed yellow in the fire-light. And now the Frenchman nudged the lank New Englander.

"Someth'ing funny is right, Soames," he said. "Look at this."

He handed the gleaming object over. Graydon saw that it was a thin golden bracelet, and as Soames turned it over in his hand he caught the green glitter of emeralds. It had been torn from Suarra's arm, he realized, in her struggle with Sterrett.

"Yes, someth'ing funny!" repeated Dancré. He glared at Graydon venomously, through slitted lids. "What that girl give you to let her go, Graydon, eh?" he spat. "What she tell you, eh?"

Soames's hand dropped to his automatic.

"She gave me nothing, I took nothing," answered Graydon.

"I t'ink you damned liar!" said Dancré, viciously. "We get Sterrett awake," he turned to Soames. "We get him awake quick. I t'ink he tell us more about this, *oui*. A girl who wears stuff like this—and he lets her go! Lets her go when he knows there must be more where this come from, eh, Soames. Damned funny is right, eh? Come, now, we see what Sterrett tell us."

Graydon watched them go into the tent. Soon Soames come out, went to a spring that bubbled up from among the trees; returned, with water.

Well, let them waken Sterrett; let him tell them whatever he would. They would not kill him that night, of that he was sure. They believed that he knew too much. And in the morning—

What was hidden in the morning for them all?

That even now they were prisoners, Graydon did not doubt. Suarra's warning not to leave the camp had been too explicit. And since that tumult of the elfin horns, her swift vanishing and the silence that had followed he had no longer doubt that they had strayed as she had said within the grasp of some power, formidable as it was mysterious.

The silence? Suddenly it came to him that the night had become strangely still. There was no sound either of insect or bird nor any stirring of the familiar after-twilight life of the wilderness.

The camp was ringed with silence!

He strode away, through the *algarroba* clump. There was a scant score of the trees. They stood up like a little leafy island peak within the brush covered savannah. They were great trees, every one of them, and set with a curious regularity as though they had not sprung up by chance; as though indeed they had been carefully planted.

Graydon reached the last of them, rested a hand against the bole that looked like myriads of tiny grubs turned to soft brown wood. He peered out. The slope that lay before him was flooded with moonlight; the yellow blooms of the *chilca* shrubs that pressed to the very feet of the trees shone wanly in the silver flood. The faintly aromatic fragrance of the *quenar* stole around him. Movement or sign of life there was none.

And yet—

The spaces seemed filled with watchers; he felt their gaze upon him; knew with an absolute certainty that some hidden host girdled the camp. He scanned every bush and shadow; saw nothing. Nevertheless the certainty of a hidden, unseen multitude persisted. A wave of nervous irritation passed through him. He would force them, whatever they were, to show themselves.

He stepped boldly into the full moonlight.

On the instant the silence intensified; seemed to draw taut; to lift itself up whole octaves of stillnesses; to become alert, expectant—as though poised to spring upon him should he take one step further!

A coldness wrapped him, a shudder shook him. He drew swiftly back to the shadow of the trees; stood there, his heart beating furiously. The silence lost its poignancy, dropped back upon its haunches—but watchful and alert!

What had frightened him? What was there in that tightening of the stillness that had touched him with finger of nightmare terror?

Trembling, he groped back, foot by foot, afraid to turn his back to the silence. Behind him the fire flared. And suddenly his fear dropped from him.

His reaction from the panic was a heady recklessness. He threw a log upon the fire and laughed as the sparks shot up among the leaves. Soames, coming out of the tent for more water, stopped as he heard that laughter and scowled at him malevolently.

"Laugh," he said. "Laugh while you can—you damned traitor. You'll laugh on the other side of your mouth when we get Sterrett up and he tells us what he knows."

"That was a sound sleep I gave him, anyway," jeered Graydon.

"There are sounder sleeps! Don't forget it." It was Dancre's voice, cold and menacing from within the tent. He heard Sterrett groan.

Graydon turned his back to the tent and deliberately faced that silence from which he had just fled. How long he sat thus he did not know. It could not have been for long. But all at once he was aware that he was staring straight into two little points of vivid light that seemed at once far, far away and very close. They were odd, he thought. What was it so odd about them? Was it their color? They were purple, a curiously intense purple. As he stared, it seemed to him that they grew larger, but the puzzling double aspect of distance and nearness did not alter.

It was very curious, he thought. He had seen two eyes—yes, they were eyes—of that peculiar purple somewhere, not long

ago. But he could not remember just where—there was a drowsiness clouding his thought. He would look at them no more. He raised his gaze, slowly and with perceptible effort, to the leafy screen above him. Unwinkingly the brilliant orbs stared back at him from it. He forced his gaze downward. There, too, they were.

And now he knew them—the eyes that had glittered from Suarra's bracelet of the dinosaurs! The eyes of that mingled serpent and woman she had called the Snake Mother!

They were drawing him—drawing him—

He realized that his lids had closed; yet, closing, they had not shut out the globes of vivid purple. His lethargy increased, but it was of the body, not of the mind. All his consciousness had concentrated, been gathered, into the focus of the weird, invading eyes.

Abruptly they retreated. And like line streaming out of a reel the consciousness of Graydon streamed out of him and after them—out of his body, out of the camp, through the grove and out into the land beyond!

It seemed to him that he passed swiftly over the moonlit wastes. They flashed beneath him, unrolling like panorama under racing plane. Ahead of him frowned a black barrier. It shrouded him and was gone. He had a glimpse of a wide circular valley rimmed by sky-piercing peaks; towering scarps of rock. There was the silver glint of a lake, the liquid silver of a mighty torrent pouring out of the heart of a precipice. He caught wheeling sight of carved colossi, gigantic shapes that sat bathed in the milky flood of the moon guarding each the mouth of a cavern.

A city rushed up to meet him, a city ruby roofed and opal turreted and fantastic as though built by jinn out of the stuff of dreams.

And then it seemed to him that he came to rest within a vast and columned hall from whose high roof fell beams of soft and dimly azure light. High arose those columns, unfolding far above into wide wondrous petalings of opal and of emerald and turquoise flecked with gold.

Before him were the eyes that in this

dream—if dream it were—had drawn him to this place. And as the consciousness which was he and yet had, he knew, neither visible shape nor shadow, beheld it recoiled, filled with terror of the unknown; struggled to make its way back to the body from which it had been lured; fluttered like a serpent trapped bird; at last, like the bird, gave itself up to the serpent fascination.

For Graydon looked upon—the Snake Mother!

She lay just beyond the lip of a wide alcove set high above the pillared floor. Between her and him the azure beams fell, curtaining the great niche with a misty radiance that half-shadowed, half-revealed her.

Her face was ageless, neither young nor old; it came to him that it was free from time forever, free from the etching acid of the years. She might have been born yesterday or a million years ago. Her eyes, set wide apart, were round and luminous; they were living jewels filled with purple fires. Above them rose her forehead, wide and high and sloping sharply back. The nose was long and delicate, the nostrils dilated; the chin small and pointed.

The mouth was small, too, and heart shaped and the lips a scarlet flame.

Down her narrow childlike shoulders flowed hair that gleamed like spun silver. The shining argent strands arrow-headed into a point upon her forehead; coiled, they gave to her face that same heart shape in which her lips were molded, a heart of which the chin was the tip.

She had high little breasts, uptilted. And face and neck, shoulders and breasts were the hue of pearls suffused faintly with rose; and like rosy pearls they glistened.

Below her breasts began her—coils!

Mistily Graydon saw them, half buried in a nest of silken cushions—thick coils and many, circle upon circle of them, covered with great heart shaped scales; glimmering and palely gleaming; each scale as exquisitely wrought as though by elfin jeweler; each opaline, nacreous; mother-of-pearl.

Her pointed chin was cupped in hands

tiny as a baby's; like a babe's were her slender arms, their dimpled elbows resting on her topmost coil.

And on that face which was neither woman's nor serpent's but subtly both—and more, far more than either—on that ageless face sat side by side and hand in hand a spirit of wisdom that was awesome and a spirit weary beyond thought!

Graydon forgot his terror. He paid homage to her beauty; for beautiful she was though terrible—this serpent woman with hair of spun silver, her face and breasts of rosy pearls, her jeweled and shimmering coils, her eyes of purple fire and her lips of living flame. A lesser homage he paid her wisdom. And he pitied her for her burden of weariness.

Fear of her he had none.

Instantly he knew that she had read all his thought; knew, too, that he had pleased her. The scarlet lips half parted in a smile—almost she preened herself! A slender red and pointed tongue flicked out and touched her scarlet lips. The tiny hands fell; she raised her head; up from her circled coils lifted and swayed a pearled pillar bearing that head aloft, slowly, sinuously, foot by foot until it paused twice the height of a tall man above the floor, twisting, it turned its face to the alcove.

Graydon, following the movement, saw that the alcove was tenanted. Within it was a throne—a throne that was as though carved from the heart of a colossal sapphire. It was oval, ten feet or more in height, and hollowed like a shrine. It rested upon or was set within the cupped end of a thick pillar of some substance resembling milky rock crystal. It was empty, so far as he could see, but around it clung a faint radiance. At its foot were five lesser thrones, low and with broad table-like seats. They were arranged in a semi-circle. The throne at the right end of this semi-circle was red as though carved from ruby; the throne at the left was black as though cut from jet; the three central thrones were red gold.

Black throne and ruby throne and middle throne of red gold were empty. In each of the other two a figure sat, cross-legged and squatting and swathed from

feet to chin in silken robes of blue and gold. Incredibly old were the faces of the pair, the stamp of lost æons deep upon them—except their eyes.

Their eyes were young; as incredibly young as their settings were ancient. And incredibly—alive! And those vital, youthful eyes were reading him; the minds behind them were weighing him; judging him. Judging him—with what purpose?

Floated through Graydon's mind—or whatever it was of him that hovered there in dream or in spell or in obedience to laws unknown to the science of his world—the memory of Suarra's vow. By the Wisdom of the Snake Mother, and by the Five Lords and by the Lord of Lords she had sworn to save him if she could.

Why—these must be they, the two Lords she had told him still lived in Yu-Atlanchi! Certainly there was the Snake Mother. And that sapphire throne of luminous mystery must be the seat of the Lord of Lords—whatever he might be.

That fantastic city that had raced upward to enfold him was—Yu-Atlanchi!

Yu-Atlanchi! Where death—where death—

The Snake Mother had turned her head; the eyes of the two Lords no longer dwelt on his. They were looking, the three of them, beyond him. The serpent woman was speaking. He heard her voice like faint, far off music. Graydon thought that he glanced behind him.

He saw—Suarra.

So close to him she stood that he could have touched her with his hand. Slender feet bare, her cloudy hair unbound, clothed only in a single scanty robe that hid no curve nor lithesome line of her, no ornament but the bracelet of the dinosaurs, she stood. If she saw him, she gave no sign.

And it came to him that she did not see him; did not know that he was there!

On her face was the light of a great gladness—as of one who has made a prayer and knows that prayer has been granted. He reached out a hand to touch her; make her aware of him. He felt nothing, nor did she move—

And suddenly he realized once more that he had no hands!

As he labored to understand this, he saw the Snake Mother's swaying column grow rigid, her purple eyes fix themselves upon some point, it seemed, far, far beyond the walls of that mysterious temple.

Swift as a blow they returned to him. They smote him; they hurled him away. The hall disintegrated, vanished. He had vertiginous sensation of nightmare speed, as though the earth had spun from under him and let him drop through space. The flight ended; a shock ran through him.

Dazed, he raised his lids. He lay beside the crackling camp fire. And half way between him and the tent was Sterrett charging down on him like a madman and bellowing red rage and vengeance as he came.

Graydon leaped to his feet, but before he could guard himself the giant was upon him. The next moment he was down, overborne by sheer weight. The big adventurer crunched a knee into his arm and gripped his throat. Sterrett's bloodshot eyes blazed into his, his teeth were bared as though to rend him.

"Let her go, did you!" he roared. "Knocked me out and then let her go! Well, damn you, Graydon, here's where you go, too!"

Frantically Graydon tried to break that grip on his throat. His lungs labored; there was a deafening roaring in his ears; flecks of crimson began to dance across his vision. Sterrett was strangling him. Through fast dimming sight he saw two black shadows leap through the firelight glare and throw themselves on his strangler; clutch the slaying hands.

The fingers relaxed. Graydon, drawing in great sobbing breaths, staggered up. A dozen paces away stood Sterrett, still cursing him, vilely; quivering; straining to leap again upon him. Dancré, arms around his knees, was hanging to him like a little terrier. Beside him was Soames, the barrel of his automatic pressed against the giant's stomach.

"Why don't you let me kill him," raved Sterrett. "Didn't I tell you the wench had enough on her to set us up the rest of our lives? Didn't I tell you she had an emerald that would have made us all

rich? And there's more where that one came from. And he let her go! Let her go, the—"

Again his curses flowed.

"Now look here, Sterrett," Soames's voice was deliberate, cold. "You be quiet or I'll do for you. We ain't goin' to let this thing get by us, me and Dancré. We ain't goin' to let this double-crossing whelp do us, and we ain't goin' to let you spill the beans by killing him. We've struck something big. All right, we're goin' to cash in on it. We're goin' to sit down peaceable and Mr. Graydon is goin' to tell us what happened after he put you out, what dicker he made with the girl and all of that. If he won't do it peaceable, then Mr. Graydon is goin' to have things done to him that'll make him give up. That's all. Danc', let go his legs. Sterrett, if you kick up any more trouble until I give the word I'm goin' to shoot you. From now on I boss this crowd—me and Danc'. You get me, Sterrett?"

Graydon, head once more clear, slid a cautious hand down toward his pistol holster. It was empty. Soames grinned, sardonically.

"We got it, Graydon," he said. "Yours, too, Sterrett. Fair enough. Sit down everybody."

He squatted by the fire, still keeping Sterrett covered. And after a moment the latter, grumbling, followed suit. Dancré dropped beside him.

"Come over here, Mr. Graydon," snarled Soames. "Come over and cough up. What're you holdin' out on us? Did you make a date with her to meet you after you got rid of us? If so, where is it—because we'll all go together."

"Where'd you hide those gold spears?" growled Sterrett. "You never let her get away with them, that's sure."

"Shut up, Sterrett," ordered Soames. "I'm holdin' this inquest. Still—there's something in that. Was that it, Graydon? Did she give you the spears and her jewelry to let her go?"

"I've told you," answered Graydon. "I asked for nothing, but I took nothing. Sterrett's drunken folly had put us all in jeopardy. Letting the girl go free was the

first vital step toward our own safety. I thought it was the best thing to do. I still think so."

"Yes?" sneered the lank New Englander, "is that so? Well, I'll tell you, Graydon, if she'd been an Indian maybe I'd agree with you. But not when she was the kind of lady Sterrett says she was. No sir, it ain't natural. You know damned well that if you'd been straight you'd have kept her here till Danc' and I got back. Then we could all have got together and figured what was the best thing to do. Hold her until her folks came along and paid up to get her back undamaged. Or give her the third degree till she gave up where all that gold and stuff she was carrying came from. That's what you would have done, Mr. Graydon, if you weren't a dirty, lyin', double-crossin' hound."

Graydon's temper awakened under the insult, his anger flared up.

"All right, Soames," he said. "I'll tell you. What I've said about freeing her for our own safety is true. But outside of that I would as soon have thought of trusting a child to a bunch of hyenas as I would of trusting that girl to you three. I let her go a damned sight more for her sake than I did for our own. Does that satisfy you?"

"Aha!" jeered Dancre. "Now I see. Here is this strange lady of so much wealth and beauty. She is too pure and good for us to behold. He tell her so and bids her fly. 'My hero,' she say, 'take all I have and give up this bad company.' 'No, no,' he tell her, 't'inking all the time if he play his cards right he get much more, and us out of the way so he need not divide, 'no, no,' he tell her. 'But long as these bad men stay here you will not be safe.' 'My hero,' say she, 'I will go and bring back my family and they shall dispose of your bad company. But you they shall reward, my hero, *oui!*' Aha, so that is what it was!"

Graydon flushed; the little Frenchman's malicious travesty shot uncomfortably close. After all, Suarra's unsought promise to save him if she could might be construed as Dancre had suggested. What if he told them that he had warned her that whatever the fate in store for them he was determined

to share it and that he would stand by them to the last? They would not believe him.

Soames had been watching him closely.

"By God, Danc'," he said. "I guess you've hit it. He changed color. He's sold us out!"

For a moment he raised his automatic, held it on Graydon. Sterrett touched his hand.

"Don't shoot him, Soames," he begged. "Give him to me. I want to break his neck."

Soames pushed him away, lowered the gun.

"No," he said, deliberately. "This is too big a thing to let slip by bein' too quick on the trigger. If your dope is right, Danc', and I guess it is, the lady was mighty grateful. All right—we ain't got her, but he have got him. As I figure it, bein' grateful, she won't want him to get killed. Well, we'll trade him for what they got that we want. Tie him up!"

He pointed the pistol at Graydon, Sterrett and Dancre went into the tent, returned with ropes from the pack saddles. Unresisting, Graydon let them bind his wrists. They pushed him over to one of the trees and sat him on the ground with his back against its bole. They passed a rope under his arms and hitched it securely around the trunk. Then they tied his feet.

"Now," said Soames, "if her gang show up in the morning, we'll let 'em see you and find out how much you're worth. They won't rush us; there's bound to be a palaver. And if they don't come to terms, well, Graydon, the first bullet out of this gun goes through your guts. That'll give you time to see what goes on before you die!"

Graydon did not answer him. Nothing that he might say, he knew, would change them from their purpose. He closed his eyes, reviewing that strange dream of his—for dream he now believed it, thrust back among the realities of the camp. A dream borne of Suarra's words and that weird bracelet of the dinosaurs from which gleamed the purple orbs of the serpent woman.

Once or twice he opened his eyes and looked at the others. They sat beside the

fire, heads close together, talking in whispers, their faces tense, and eyes a-glitter with greed, feverish with the gold lust.

And after a while Graydon's head dropped forward. He slept.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE LLAMA.

IT was dawn when Graydon awakened. Some one had thrown a blanket over him during the night, but he was, nevertheless, cold and stiff. He drew his legs up and down painfully, trying to start the sluggish blood. He heard the others stirring in the tent. He wondered which of them had thought of the blanket, and why he had been moved to that kindness.

Sterrett lifted the tent flap, passed by him without a word and went on to the spring. Graydon heard him drinking, thirstily. He returned and busied himself about the fire. There was an oddly furtive air about the big man. Now and then he looked at the prisoner, but with neither anger nor resentment. Rather were his glances apologetic, ingratiating. He slipped at last to the tent, listened, then trod softly over to Graydon.

"Sorry about this," he muttered. "But I can't do anything with Soames or Dancré. Had a hard time persuading 'em even to let you have that blanket. Here take a drink of this."

He pressed a flask to Graydon's lips. He took a liberal swallow; it warmed him.

"Sh-h," warned Sterrett. "Don't bear any grudge. Drunk last night. I'll help you—" He broke off, abruptly; busied himself with the burning logs. Out of the tent came Soames. He scanned Sterrett suspiciously, then strode over to Graydon.

"I'm goin' to give you one last chance, Graydon," he began without preliminary. "Come through clean with us on your dicker with the girl and we'll take you back with us and all work together and all share together. You had the edge on us yesterday and I don't know that I blame you. But it's three to one now and the plain truth is you can't get away with it. So why not be reasonable?"

"What's the use of going over all that again, Soames?" Graydon asked wearily. "I've told you everything. If you're wise, you'll let me loose, give me my guns and I'll fight for you when the trouble comes. For trouble is coming man, sure—big trouble."

"Yeh?" snarled the New Englander. "Tryin' to scare us, are you? All right—there's a nice little trick of drivin' a wedge under each of your finger nails and a-keepin' drivin' 'em in. It makes 'most anybody talk after a while. And if it don't there's the good old fire dodge. Rollin' your feet up to it, closer and closer and closer. Yes, anybody'll talk when their toes begin to crisp up and toast."

Suddenly he bent over and sniffed at Graydon's lips.

"So that's it!" he faced Sterrett, tense, gun leveled from his hip pocket straight at the giant. "Been feedin' him liquor, have you? Been talkin' to him, have you? After we'd settled it last night that I was to do all the talkin'. All right, that settles you, Sterrett. Dancré! Dancré! Come here, quick!" he roared.

The Frenchman came running out of the tent.

"Tie him up," Soames nodded toward Sterrett. "Another damned double-crosser in the camp. Gave him liquor. Got their heads together while we were inside. Tie him."

"But Soames," the Frenchman was hesitant, "if we have to fight the Indians it is not well to have half of us helpless, no. Perhaps Sterrett he did nothing—"

"If we have to fight, two men will do as well as three," said Soames. "I ain't goin' to let this thing slip through my fingers, Dancré. I don't think we'll have to do any fightin'. If they come, I think it's goin' to be a tradin' job. Sterrett's turnin' traitor, too. Tie him, I say."

"Well, I don't like it—" began Dancré: Soames made an impatient motion with his automatic; the little Frenchman went to the tent, returned with a coil of rope, sidled up to Sterrett.

"Put up your hands," ordered Soames. Sterrett swung them up. But in mid swing they closed on Dancré, lifted him like a

doll and held him between himself and the gaunt New Englander.

"Now shoot, damn you," he cried, and bore down on Soames, meeting every move of his pistol arm with Dancre's wriggling body. Then his own right hand swept down to the Frenchman's belt, drew from the holster his automatic, leveled it over the twisting shoulder at Soames.

"Drop your gun, Yank," grinned Sterrett triumphantly. "Or shoot if you want. But before your bullet's half through Dancre here, by Heaven I'll have *you* drilled clean!"

There was a momentary, sinister silence. It was broken by a sudden pealing of tiny golden bells. Their chiming cleft through the murk of murder that had fallen on the camp; lightened it; dissolved it as the sunshine does a cloud. Graydon saw Soames's pistol drop from a hand turned nerveless; saw Sterrett's iron grip relax and let Dancre fall to the ground; saw the heads of Dancre and Sterrett and Soames stiffen and point to the source of that aureate music like hounds to a huddling covey.

His own eyes followed—

Through the trees, not a hundred yards away, was Suarra!

And there was no warrior host around her. She had brought with her neither avengers nor executioners. With her were but two followers. Yet even at his first glimpse it came to Graydon that if these were servants, they were two strange, strange servants indeed!

A cloak of soft green swathed the girl from neck almost to slender feet. In the misty midnight hair gleamed a coronal of emeralds set in red gold, and bandlets of gold studded with the same virescent gems circled her wrists and ankles. Behind her paced sedately a snow white llama; there was a broad golden collar around its neck from which dropped the strands of golden bells that shook out the tinkling harmonies. Its eyes were blue and between them swayed a pendant of some gem, rosy as the fruit of rubies mated to white pearls. From each of its silvery silken sides a pannier hung, woven, it seemed, from shining yellow rushes.

And at the snow white llama's flanks were two figures, bodies covered by voluminous robes whose goods covered their faces. One was draped in darkest blue; he carried a staff of ebony and strode beside the llama somberly, something disconcertingly mathematical in each step he took. The other was draped in yellow; he carried a staff of vermilion and he fluttered and danced beside the beast, taking little steps backward and forward; movements that carried the weird suggestion that his robes clothed not a man but some huge bird.

Save for the tinkling of the bells there was no sound as they came on. Graydon's three jailers stared at the caravan struck immobile with amazement, incredulous, like dreaming men. Graydon himself strained at his bonds, a sick horror in his heart. Why had Suarra returned deliberately back to this peril? He had warned her; she could not be so innocent as not to know what dangers threatened her at the hands of these men. And why had she come decked out with a queen's ransom in jewels and gold? Almost it seemed that she had done this deliberately; had deliberately arrayed herself to arouse to the full the very passions from which she had most to fear!

"*Dieu!*" It was Dancre, whispering. "The emeralds!"

"God—what a girl!" it was Sterrett, muttering; his thick nostrils distended, a red flicker in his eyes.

Only Soames said nothing, perplexity, suspicion struggling through the blank astonishment on his bleak and crafty face. Nor did he speak as the girl and her attendants halted close beside him. But the doubt, the suspicion, in his eyes grew as he scanned her and the hooded pair, then sent his gaze along the path up which they had come searching every tree, every bush. There was no sign of movement there, no sound.

"Suarra!" cried Graydon, despairingly, "Suarra, why did you come back?"

Quietly, she stepped over to him, drew a dagger from beneath her cloak, cut the thong that bound him to the tree, slipped the blade under the cords about his wrists

and ankles; freed him. He staggered to his feet.

"Was it not well for you that I did come?" she asked sweetly.

Before he could answer, Soames strode forward. And Graydon saw that he had come to some decision, had resolved upon some course of action. He made a low, awkward, half mocking, half respectful bow to the girl; then spoke to Graydon.

"All right," he said, "you can stay loose—as long as you do what I want you to. The girl's back and that's the main thing. She seems to favor you quite a lot, Graydon—an' maybe that's goin' to be damned useful. I reckon that gives us a way to persuade her to talk if how happens it she turns quiet like when I get to askin' her certain things—like where those emeralds come from an' how to get there an' the likes of that. Yes, sir, and you favor her. That's useful too. I reckon you won't want to be tied up an' watch certain things happen to her, eh—" he leered at Graydon who curbed with difficulty the impulse to send his fist crashing into the cynical face. "But there's just one thing you've got to do if you want things to go along peaceable," Soames continued. "Don't do any talkin' to her when I ain't close by. Remember, I know the Aymara as well as you do. And I want to be right alongside listenin' in all the time, do you see? That's all."

He turned to Suarra, bowed once more.

"Your visit has brought great happiness, maiden," he spoke in the Aymara. "It will not be a short one, if we have our way—and I think we *will* have our way—" there was covert, but unmistakable menace in the phrase, yet if she noted it she gave no heed. "You are strange to us, as we must be to you. There is much for us each to learn, one of the other."

"That is true, stranger," she answered, tranquilly. "I think though that your desire to learn of me is much greater than mine to learn of you—since, as you surely know, I have had one not too pleasant lesson." She glanced at Sterrett.

"The lessons, sister," he told her bluntly, indeed brutally, "shall be pleasant or—not pleasant even as you choose to teach us or not to teach us—what we would learn."

This time there was no mistaking the covert menace in the words, nor did Suarra again let it pass. Her eyes blazed sudden wrath.

"Better not to threaten," she warned, her proud little head thrown haughtily back. "I, Suarra, am not used to threats—and if you will take my counsel you will keep them to yourself hereafter."

"Yes, is that so?" Soames took a step toward her, face grown grim and ugly; instantly Graydon thrust himself between him and the girl. There came a curious, dry chuckling from the hooded figure in yellow. Suarra started; her wrath, her hauteur vanished; she became once more naïve, friendly. She pushed Graydon aside.

"I was hasty," she said to Soames. "Nevertheless it is never wise to threaten unless you know the strength of what it is you menace. And remember, of me you know nothing. Yet I know all that you wish to learn. You wish to know how I came by this—and this—and this—" she touched her coronal, her bracelet, her anklets. "You wish to know where they came from, and if there are more of them there, and if so how you may possess yourself of as much as you can carry away. Well, you shall know all that. I have come to tell you."

At this astonishing announcement, apparently so frank and open, all the doubt and suspicion returned to Soames. Again his gaze narrowed and searched the trail up which Suarra and her caravan had come. It returned and rested on the girl; then scrutinized the two servitors who, Graydon now realized, had stood like images ever since that caravan had come to rest within the camp; motionless, and except for that one dry, admonitory chuckling, soundless.

And as he stood thus, considering, Dancre came up and gripped his arm.

"Soames," he said, and his voice and his hand were both shaking, "the baskets on the llama! They're not rushes—they're gold, pure gold, pure soft gold, woven like straw! *Dieu*, Soames, what have we struck!"

Soames's eyes glittered.

"Better go over and watch where they came up, Danc'," he answered. "I don't quite get this. It looks too cursed easy to be right. Take your rifle and squint out from the edge of the trees while I try to get down to what's what."

As though she had understood the words, Suarra struck in:

"There is nothing to fear. No harm will come to you from me. If there is any evil in store for you, you yourselves shall summon it—not us. I have come to show you the way to treasure. Only that. Come with me and you shall see where jewels like these"—she touched the gems meshed in her hair—"grow like flowers in a garden. You shall see the gold come streaming forth, living, from—" she hesitated; then went on—"come streaming forth like water. You may bathe in that stream, drink from it if you will, carry away all that you can bear. Or if it causes you too much sorrow to leave it, why—you may stay with it forever; nay, become a part of it, even. Men of gold!"

She laughed; turned from them; walked toward the llama.

The men stared at her and at each other; on the faces of three, greed and suspicion; bewilderment on Graydon's, for beneath the mockery of those last words he had sensed the pulse of the sinister.

"It is a long journey," she faced them, one hand on the llama's head. "You are strangers here; indeed, my guests—in a sense. Therefore a little I have brought for your entertainment before we start."

She began to unbuckle the panniers. And Graydon was again aware that these two attendants of hers were strange servants—if servants, again, they were. They made no move to help her. Silent they still stood, motionless, faces covered. In their immobility he felt something implacable, ominous, dread. A little shiver shook him.

He stepped forward to help the girl. She smiled up at him, half shyly. In the midnight depths of her eyes was a glow warmer far than friendliness; his hands leaped to touch hers.

Instantly Soames stepped between them.

"Better remember what I told you," he snapped; then ran his hand over the side

of the pannier. And Graydon realized that Dancré had spoken truth. The panniers were of gold; soft gold, gold that had been shaped into willow-like withes and plaited.

"Help me," came Suarra's voice. Graydon lifted the basket and set it down beside her. She slipped a hasp; bent back the soft metal withes; drew out a shimmering packet. She shook it and it floated out on the dawn wind, a cloth of silver. She let it float to the ground where it lay like a great web of gossamer spun by silver spiders.

Then from the hamper she brought forth cups of gold and deep, boat shaped golden dishes, two tall ewers whose handles were slender carved dragons, their scales made, it seemed, from molten rubies. After them small golden withed baskets. She set the silver cloth with the dishes and the cups. She opened the little baskets. In them were unfamiliar, fragrant fruits and loaves and oddly colored cakes. All these Suarra placed upon the plates. She dropped to her knees at the head of the cloth, took up one of the ewers, snapped open its lid and from it poured into the cups clear amber wine.

She raised her eyes to them; waved a white hand, graciously.

"Sit," she said. "Eat and drink."

She beckoned to Graydon; pointed to the place beside her. Silently, gaze fixed on the glittering hoard, Sterrett and Dancré and Soames squatted before the other plates. Soames thrust out a hand, took up one of these and weighed it, scattering what it held upon the ground.

"Gold!" he breathed.

Sterrett laughed, crazily; raised his wine filled goblet to his lips.

"Wait!" Dancré caught his wrist. "Eat and drink, she said, eh? Eat, drink and be merry—for to-morrow we die, eh—is that it, Soames?"

The New Englander started, face once more dark with doubt.

"You think it's poisoned?" he snarled.

"Maybe so—maybe no," the little Frenchman shrugged. "But I think it better we say 'After you' to her."

"They are afraid. They think it is—that you have—" Graydon stumbled.

"That I have put sleep—or death in it?" Suarra smiled. "And you?" she asked.

For answer Graydon raised his cup and drank it. For a moment she contemplated him, approval in her gaze.

"Yet it is natural," she turned to Soames. "Yes, it is natural that you three should fear this, since, is it not so—it is what you would do if you were we and we were you? But you are wrong. I tell you again that you have nothing to fear from me—who come only to show you a way. I tell you again that what there is to fear as we go on that way is that which is in yourselves."

She poured wine into her own cup, drank it; broke off a bit of Sterrett's bread and ate it; took a cake from Dancré's plate and ate that, set white teeth in one of the fragrant fruits.

"Are you satisfied," she asked them. "Oh, be very sure that if it were in my wish to bring death to you it would be in no such form as this."

For a moment Soames glared at her. Then he sprang to his feet, strode over to the hooded, watching figures and snatched aside the cowl of the blue robed one. Graydon with a cry of anger leaped up and after him—then stood, turned to stone.

For the face that Soames had unmasked was like old ivory and it was seamed with a million lines; a face stamped with unbelievable antiquity, but whose eyes were bright and as incredibly youthful as their setting was ancient—

The face of one of those two draped figures that had crouched upon the thrones in that mystic temple of his dream!

The face of one of those mysterious Lords who with that being of coiled beauty Suarra had named the Snake Mother, had listened to, and as he then had thought had granted, Suarra's unknown prayer!

A dozen heart beats it may be the gaunt New Englander stared into that inscrutable, ancient face and its unwinking brilliant eyes. Then he let the hood drop and walked slowly back to the silver cloth. And as he passed him, Graydon saw that his face was white and his gaze was fixed as though he had looked into some unnamable terror. And as he threw himself

down at his place and raised his wine cup to his lips, his hand was shaking.

The spell that had held Graydon relaxed. He looked at the black robed figure; it stood as before, motionless and silent. He dropped beside Suarra. Soames, hand still shaking, held out to her his empty goblet. She filled it; he drained it and she filled it again. And Graydon saw now that Sterrett's ruddy color had fled and that Dancré's lips were twitching and had grown gray.

What was it that they had seen in that seamed, ivory face that had been invisible to him? What warning? What vision of horror?

They drank thirstily of the wine. And soon it had taken effect; had banished their terror—whatever it had been. They ate hungrily of the loaves, the little cakes, the fruit. At last the plates were empty—the tall ewer, too.

"And now," Suarra arose, "it is time for us to go—if you desire still to be led to that treasure house of which I have told you."

"We're going, sister, never fear," Soames grinned half drunkenly, and lurched to his feet. "Dancré, stay right here and watch things. Come on Sterrett," he slapped the giant on the back, all distrust, for the moment at least, vanished. "Come on, Graydon, let by-gones be by-gones."

Sterrett laughed vacantly, scrambled up and linked his arms in the New Englander's. Together they made their way to the tent. Dancré, rifle ready, settled down on a boulder just beyond the fire and began his watch.

Graydon lingered behind. Soames had forgotten him, for a little time at least; he meant to make the best of that time with this strange maid whose beauty and sweetness had netted heart and brain as no other woman ever had. He came close to her, so close that the subtle fragrance of her cloudy hair rocked his heart, so close that her shoulder touching his sent through him little racing, maddening flames.

"Suarra—" he began, hoarsely. Swiftly she turned and silenced him with slender fingers on his lips.

"Not now," she whispered. "You must

not tell me what is in your heart—O man to whom my own heart is eager to speak. Not now—nor, it may be, ever—” there was sorrow in her eyes, longing, too; quickly she veiled them—“I promised you that I would save you—if I could. And of that vow was born another promise—” her glance sought the two silent, quiet shapes in blue and in yellow, meaningly. “So speak to me not again,” she went on hurriedly, “or if you must—let it be of commonplace things, not of that which is in your heart—or mine!”

Stupidly he looked at her. What did she mean by a promise born of that she had made to him? A vow to these—Lords; to the mystery of the serpent’s coils and woman’s face and breasts—the Snake Mother? A vow in exchange for his life? Had they seen deeper into her heart than he and found there in very truth what he had half dreamed might be? Had she vowed to them to hold him apart from her if they would grant him protection, his comrades too—if they would have it?

Suddenly it came to him that for him, at least, the life she would save by such a barter would not be worth living.

She was packing away the golden cups and dishes. Mechanically he set about helping her. And, save for what he handled, he thought with grim humor, this was a commonplace thing enough surely to satisfy her. She accepted his aid without comment, looked at him no more. And after a while the fever in his blood cooled, his hot revolt crystallized into cold determination. For the moment he would accept the situation. He would let matters develop. His time would come. He could afford to wait.

Without a word when the last shining cup was in the pannier and the mouth of the latter closed he turned and strode to the tent to get together his duffle, pack his burro. The voices of Sterrett and Soames came to him; he hesitated; listened.

“What it was when I looked into his damned wrinkled old face I don’t know,” he heard Soames say. “But something came over me, Sterrett. I can’t remember—only that it was like looking over the edge of the world into hell!”

“I know,” Sterrett’s voice was hoarse, “I felt the same way.”

“Hypnotism,” said Soames, “that’s what it was. The Indian priests down here know how to work it. But he won’t catch me again with that trick. I’ll shoot. You can’t hypnotize a gun, Sterrett.”

“But they’re not Indians, Soames,” came Sterrett’s voice. “They’re whiter than you and me. What are they? And the girl—God—”

“What they are we’ll find out, never fear,” grunted the New Englander. “To hell with the girl—take her if you can get her. But I’d go through a dozen hells to get to the place where that stuff they’re carryin’ samples of comes from. Man—with what we could carry out on the burros and the llama and come back for—man, we could buy the world!”

“Yes—unless there’s a trap somewhere,” said Sterrett, dubiously.

“We’ve got the cards in our hands,” plainly the drink was wearing off Soames, all his old confidence and cunning were returning. “Hell—what’s against us? Two old men and a girl. Now I’ll tell you what I think. I don’t know who or what they are, but whoever or whatever, you can bet there ain’t many of ’em. If there was, they’d be landin’ on us hard. No—they’re damned anxious to get us away and they’re willin’ to let us get out with what we can to get us away. Poor boobs—they think if they give us what we want now we’ll slip right off and never come back. And as for what they are, well, I’ll tell you what I think—half-breeds. The Spanish were down here; maybe they bred in with the Incas. There’s probably about a handful left. They know we could wipe ’em out in no time. They want to get rid of us, quick and cheap as possible. And the three of us could wipe ’em out.”

“Three of us?” asked Sterrett. “Four you mean. There’s Graydon.”

“Graydon don’t count—the damned crook. Thought he’d sold us out, didn’t he? All right—we’ll fix Mr. Graydon when the time comes. Just now he’s useful to us on account of the girl. She’s stuck on him. But when the time comes to divide—there’ll only be three of us. And there’ll

only be two of us—if you do anything like you did this morning.”

“Cut that out, Soames,” growled the giant. “I told you it was the drink. I’m through with that now that we’ve seen this stuff. I’m with you to the limit. Do what you want with Graydon. But save the girl for me. I’d be willing to make a bargain with you on that—give up a part of my share.”

“Oh, hell,” drawled Soames. “We’ve been together a good many years, Bill. There’s enough and plenty for the three of us. You can have the girl for nothing.”

Little flecks of red danced before Graydon’s eyes. With his hand stretched to tear open the tent flap and grapple with these two who could talk so callously and evilly of Suarra’s disposal, he checked himself. That was no way to help her. Unarmed, what could he do against these armed adventurers? Nothing. Some way he must get back his own weapons. And the danger was not imminent—they would do nothing before they reached that place of treasure to which Suarra had promised to lead them.

There had been much of reason in Soames’s explanation of the mystery.

That vision of his—what was it after all but an illusion? He remembered the sensation that had caught him when he had first seen those brilliant purple jewels in Suarra’s bracelet; the feeling that he looked along them for great distances back to actual eyes of which the purple jewels were but prolongations. That vision of his—was it not but a dream induced by those jewels? A fantasy of the subconsciousness whipped out of it by some hypnotic quality they possessed? Science, he knew, admits that some gems hold this quality—though why they do science cannot tell. Dimly he remembered that he had once read a learned article that had tried to explain the power—something about the magnetic force in light, a force within those vibrations we call color; something about this force being taken up by the curious mechanism of rods and cones in the retina which flashes the sensations we call color along the optic nerves to the brain.

These flashes, he recalled the article had said, were actual though minute discharges of electricity. And since the optic nerves are not in reality nerves at all, but prolongations of the brain, this unknown force within the gems impinged directly upon the brain, stimulating some cells, depressing others, affecting memory and judgment, creating visions, disturbing all that secret world until the consciousness became dazzled, bewildered, unable to distinguish between reality and illusion.

So much for his vision. That the face of the figure in blue seemed to be one of those Lords he had seen in that vision—well, was not that but another illusion?

Soames might well be right, too, he thought, in his interpretation of Suarra’s visit to the camp. If she had power behind her would she not have brought it? Was it not more reasonable to accept the New Englander’s version of the thing?

And if that were so, then Suarra was but a girl with only two old men to help her—for he had no doubt that the figure in yellow like that in blue was an old man too.

And all that meant that he, Graydon, was all of strength that Suarra could really count on to protect her.

He had spun his web of reasoning with the swiftness of a dream. When he had arrived at its last strand he stole silently back a score of paces; waited for a moment or two; then went noisily to the tent. For the first time in many hours he felt in full command of himself; thought he saw his way clear before him. Faintly he recognized that he had glossed over, set aside arbitrarily, many things. No matter—it was good to get his feet on earth again, to brush aside all these cobwebs of mystery, to take the common sense view. It was good and it was—safer.

He thrust aside the tent flap and entered.

“Been a long while comin’,” snarled Soames, again his old, suspicious self. “Been talkin’—after what I told you?”

“Not a word,” answered Graydon cheerfully. He busied himself with his belongings. “By the way, Soames,” he said casually, “don’t you think it’s time to stop this nonsense and give me back my guns?”

Soames made no answer; went on with his hasty packing.

"Ob, all right then," Graydon went on. "I only thought that they would come in handy when the pinch comes. But if you want me to look on while you do the scrapping—well, I don't mind."

"You'd better mind." Soames did not turn around, but his voice was deadly. "You'd better mind, Graydon. If a pinch comes—we're takin' no chances of a bullet in our backs. That's why you got no guns. And if the pinch does come—well, we'll take no chances on you anyway. Do you get me?"

Graydon shrugged his shoulders. In silence the packing was completed; the tent struck; the burros loaded.

Suarra stood awaiting them at the side of the white llama. Soames walked up to her, drew from its holster his automatic, balanced it in outstretched hand.

"You know what this is?" he asked her.

"Why, yes," she answered. "It is the death weapon of your kind."

"Right," said Soames. "And it deals death quickly, quicker than spears or arrows." He raised his voice so there could be no doubt that blue cowl and yellow cowl must also bear. "Now, sister, I and these two men here," he indicated Sterrett and Dancre, "carry these and others still more deadly. This man's weapons we have taken from him," he pointed to Graydon. "Your words may be clearest truth. I hope they are—for your sake and this man's and the two who came with you—him and him—" he wagged a long finger at Graydon, at blue cowl, at yellow cowl. "Quick death! We'll get them out of the way first. And we'll attend to you later—as it seems best to me."

He scanned her through slitted eyes that gleamed coldly.

"You understand me?" he asked, and grinned like a hungry wolf.

"I understand," Suarra's eyes and face were calm, but there was more than a touch of scorn in her golden voice. "You need fear nothing from us."

"We don't," said Soames. "But you have much to fear—from us."

Another moment he regarded her, menac-

ingly; then shoved his pistol back into its holster.

"Go first," he ordered. "Your two attendants behind you. And then you," he pointed to Graydon. "We three march in the rear—with guns ready."

Without a word Suarra swung away at the white llama's head; behind her paced blue cowl and yellow. And a dozen paces behind them walked Graydon. Behind the file of burros strode giant Sterrett, lank Soames, little Dancre—rifles ready, eyes watchful.

And so they passed through the giant *algarrobas*; out into the oddly parklike spaces beyond.

CHAPTER V.

THE THING THAT FLED.

THEY had traveled over the savanna for perhaps an hour when Suarra abruptly turned to the left, entering the forest that covered the flanks of a great mountain. Soon the trees closed in on them. Graydon could see no trail, yet the girl went on surely, without pause. He knew there must be signs to guide her since her course took them now to one side, now to another; once he was certain that they had almost circled. Yes, trail there must be—unless Suarra was purposely trying to confuse them to prevent them from return. He could see nothing around him but the immense tree trunks, while the thick roof of leaves shut out all sight of the sun and so hid this means of discovering direction.

Another hour went by and the way began to climb, the shade to grow denser. Deeper it became and deeper until the girl was but a flitting shadow. Blue robe he could hardly see at all, but yellow robe stood out sharply, his bird suggestion suddenly accentuated—as though he had been a monstrous yellow parrot.

Once or twice Graydon had glanced at the three men behind him. The darkness was making them more and more uneasy. They walked close together, eyes and ears obviously strained to catch first faint stirrings of ambush. And now, as the green gloom grew denser still, Soames strode for-

ward and curtly ordered him to join Dancré and Sterrett. For an instant he hesitated; read murder in the New Englander's eyes; realized the futility of resistance and dropped back. Soames pressed forward until he was close behind blue cowl and yellow. They did not turn their heads nor did the girl.

Dancré motioned him in between himself and Sterrett, grinning wickedly.

"Soames has changed his plan," he whispered. "If there is trouble he shoot the old devils—quick. He keep the girl to make trade wit' her people. He keep you to make trade wit' the girl. Eh?"

Graydon did not answer. He had already realized what the maneuver meant. But a wave of jubilation swept over him. When the Frenchman had pressed close to him he had felt an automatic in his side pocket. If an attack did come, he thought, he would leap upon Dancré, snatch the pistol and gain for himself at least a fighting chance. He kept as close to him as he dared without arousing suspicion.

Darker grew the woods until the figures in front of him were only a moving blue. Then swiftly the gloom began to lighten. It came to him that they had been passing through some ravine, some gorge whose unseen walls had been pressing in upon them and that had now begun to retreat.

A few minutes longer and he knew he was right. Ahead of them loomed a prodigious doorway, a cleft whose sides reached up for thousands of feet. Beyond was a flood of sunshine, dazzling. Suarra stopped at the rocky threshold with a gesture of warning; peered through; beckoned them on.

Blinking, Graydon walked through the portal. Behind and on each side towered the mountain. He looked out over a broad grass covered plain strewn with huge, isolated rocks rising from the green like menhirs of the Druids. There were no trees. The plain was dish shaped; an enormous oval as symmetrical as though it had been molded by the thumb of Cyclopean potter. Straight across it, five miles or more away, the forests began again. They clothed the base of another gigantic mountain whose walls arose perpendicularly a mile at least

in air. The smooth scarps described, he saw, an arc of a tremendous circle—as round as Fujiyama's sacred cone, but hundreds of times its girth.

Rushed back on Graydon the picture of that hidden circular valley with its wheeling, moon bathed colossi and uprushing city of djinns into which last night he had dreamed the purple eyes of the Snake Mother had drawn him! Had it after all been no dream, but true vision? Were these rounded precipices the outer shell of that incredible place?

Suarra's story—true?

Shaken, he glanced toward her. She stood a dozen paces away, hand on the white llama's neck and gazing intently over the plain. There was anxiety in her gaze—but there was none in the attitude of those two strange servitors of hers. As silent, as unconcerned, as detached as ever, they seemed to await the girl's next move.

And now Graydon noted that they were on a wide ledge that bordered this vast oval bowl. This shelf was a full hundred feet higher than the bottom of the valley whose sides sloped up to it like the sides of a saucer. And, again carrying out that suggestion of huge dish, the ledge jutted out like a rim. He guessed that there was a concavity under his feet, and that if one should fall over the side it would be well nigh impossible to climb back because of that overhang. The surface was about twelve feet wide, and more like road carefully leveled by human hands than work of nature. Its nearer boundary was a tree covered wall of rock; unscalable. On one side the curving bowl of the valley with its weird monoliths and the circular scarp of the mysterious mountain; on the other the wooded cliffs.

There was a stirring in the undergrowth where the trees ended their abrupt descent. A goat like animal slipped out of the covert and paused, head high, nostrils testing the air.

"Meat!" exclaimed Sterrett. His rifle cracked. The beast sank to the path, twitched and lay still. Suarra leaped from the llama's side and faced the giant, eyes blazing wrath and behind that anger, or so it seemed to Graydon, fear.

"Fool!" she cried, and stamped her foot. "You fool! Get back to the cleft. Quick! All of you."

She ran to the llama; caught it by the bridle; drove it, the burros and the four men back to the shelter of the ravine mouth.

"You—" she spoke to Soames, "if you desire to reach that gold for which you thirst, see that this man uses no more that death weapon of his while we are on this path. Nor any of you. Now stay here—and be quiet until I bid you come forth."

She did not wait for reply. She ran to the cleft's opening and Graydon followed. She paused there, scanning the distant forest edge. And once more—and with greater force than ever before—the tranquillity, the inhuman immobility, the indifference of those two enigmatic servitors assailed him.

They had not moved from the path. Suarra took a step toward them, and half held out helpless, beseeching hands. They made no movement—and with a little helpless sigh she dropped her hands and resumed her scrutiny of the plain.

There flickered through Graydon a thought, a vague realization. In these two cloaked and hooded figures dwelt—power. He had not been wrong in recognizing them as the Two Lords of the luminous temple. But the power they owned would not be spent to save him or the three from any consequences of their own acts, would not be interposed between any peril that they themselves should invite.

Yes, that was it! There had been some vow—some bargain—even as Suarra had said. She had promised to save him, Graydon—if she could. She had promised the others treasure and freedom—if they could win them. Very well—the hooded pair would not interfere. But neither would they help. They were judges, watching a game. They had given Suarra permission to play that game—but left the playing of it rigidly up to her.

That nevertheless they would protect her he also believed. And with that conviction a great burden lifted from his mind. Her anxiety now he understood. It was not for herself, but for—him!

"Suarra," he whispered. She did not turn her head, but she quivered at his voice.

"Go back," she said. "Those for whom I watch have sharp eyes. Stay with the others—"

Suddenly he could have sworn that he heard the whirling beat of great wings over her head. He saw—nothing. Yet she lifted her arms in an oddly summoning gesture, spoke in words whose sounds were strange to him, all alien liquid labials and soft sibilants. Once more he heard the wing beats and then not far away but faint, so faint, a note of the elfin horn!

She dropped her arms, motioned him back to the others. From the dimness of the cleft he watched her. Slow minutes passed. Again he heard the horn note, the faint whirring as of swiftly beating pinions above her. And again could see nothing!

But as though she had received some message Suarra turned, the anxiety, the trouble gone from her face. She beckoned.

"Come out," she said. "None has heard. We can be on our way. But remember what I have said. Not a second time may you escape."

She marched on with the llama. When she reached the animal that had fallen to Sterrett's aim she paused.

"Take that," she ordered. "Throw it back among the trees as far as you can from this path."

"Hell, Soames," cried Sterrett. "Don't fall for that. It's good meat. I'll slip it in on one of the burros."

But Soames was staring at the girl.

"Afraid something 'll track us by it?" he asked. She nodded. Some of the cynic evil fled from the New Englander's face.

"She's right," he spoke curtly to Sterrett. "Pick it up and throw it away. And do as she says. I think she's goin' to play square with us. No more shootin', d'you hear?"

Sterrett picked up the little animal and hurled it viciously among the trees.

The caravan set forth along the rimlike way. Noon came and in another ravine that opened upon the strange road they snatched from saddle bags a hasty lunch. They did not waste time in unpacking the burros. There was a little brook singing in

the pass and from it they refilled their canteens, then watered the animals. This time Suarra did not join them, sitting aloof with blue cowl and yellow.

By mid-afternoon they were nearing the northern end of the bowl. All through the day the circular mountain across the plain had unrolled its vast arc of cliff. And through the day Suarra's watch of its forest clothed base had never slackened. A wind had arisen, sweeping toward them from those wooded slopes, bending the tall heads of the grass so far below them.

Suddenly, deep within that wind, Graydon heard a faint, far off clamor, an eerie hissing, shrill and avid, as of some onrushing army of snakes. The girl heard it too, for she halted and stood tense, face turned toward the sounds. They came again—and louder. And now her face whitened, but her voice when she spoke was steady.

"Danger is abroad," she said. "Deadly danger for you. It may pass and—it may not. Until we know what to expect you must hide. Take your animals and tether them in the underbrush there." She pointed to the mountain side which here was broken enough for cover. "The four of you take trees and hide behind them. Tie the mouths of your animals that they may make no noise."

"So?" snarled Soames. "So here's the trap, is it? All right, sister, you know what I told you. We'll go into the trees, but—you go with us where we can keep our hands on you."

"I will go with you," she answered indifferently. "If those who come have not been summoned by the noise of that fool's death weapon"—she pointed at Sterrett—"you can be saved. If they have been summoned by it—none can save you."

Soames glared at her, then turned abruptly.

"Danc'," he ordered, "Sterrett—get the burros in. And Graydon—you'll stay with the burros and see they make no noise. We'll be right close—with the guns—and we'll have the girl—don't forget that."

Again the wind shrilled with the hissing.

"Be quick," cried Suarra.

Swiftly they hid themselves. When

trees and underbrush had closed in upon them it flashed on Graydon, crouching behind the burros, that he had not seen the two cloaked familiars of Suarra join the hurried retreat and seek the shelter of the woods. He was at the edge of the path and cautiously he parted the bushes; peered through.

The two were not upon the rim!

Simultaneously, the same thought had come to Dancré. His voice came from a near-by bole.

"Soames—where those two old devils wit' the girl go?"

"Where'd they go?" Soames repeated blankly. "Why, they came in with us, of course."

"I did not see them," persisted Dancré. "I t'ink not, Soames. If they did—then where are they?"

"You see those two fellows out on the path, Graydon?" called Soames, anxiety in his tones.

"No," answered Graydon curtly.

Soames cursed wickedly.

"So that's the game, eh?" he grunted.

"It's a trap! And they've cut out and run to bring 'em here!"

He dropped into the Aymara and spoke to Suarra.

"You know where those men of yours are?" he asked menacingly.

Graydon heard her laugh and knew that she was close beside the New Englander with Dancré and Sterrett flanking her.

"They come and go as they will," she answered serenely.

"They'll come and go as I will," he snarled. "Call them."

"I call them," again Suarra laughed.

"Why, they do not my bidding. Nay—I must do theirs—"

"Don't do that, Soames!" Dancré's cry was sharp, and Graydon knew that Soames must have made some threatening movement. "If they're gone, you cannot bring them back. We have the girl. Stop, I say!"

Graydon jumped to his feet. Bullets or no bullets, he would fight for her. As he poised to leap a sudden gust of wind tore at the trees. It brought with it a burst of the weird hissing, closer, strident, in it a

devilish undertone that filled him with unfamiliar nightmarish terror.

Instantly came Suarra's voice.

"Down! Down—Graydon!"

Then Dancree's, quivering Graydon knew, with the same fear that had gripped him:

"Down! Soames won't hurt her. For God's sake, hide yourself, Graydon, till we know what's coming!"

Graydon turned; looked out over the plain before he sank again behind the burros. And at that moment, from the forests which at this point of the narrowing bowl were not more than half a mile away, he saw dart out a streak of vivid scarlet. It hurled itself into the grass and scuttled with incredible speed straight toward one of the monoliths that stood, black and sheer a good three quarters of the distance across the dish shaped valley and its top fifty feet or more above the green. From Graydon's own height he could see the scarlet thing's swift rush through the grasses. As he sank down it came to him that whatever it was, it must be of an amazing length to be visible so plainly at that distance. And what was it? It ran like some gigantic insect!

He parted the bushes, peered out again. The scarlet thing had reached the monolith's base. And as he watched, it raised itself against the rock and swarmed up its side to the top. At the edge it paused, seemed to raise its head cautiously and scan the forest from which it had come.

The air was clear, and against the black background of the stone, the vividly colored body stood out. Graydon traced six long, slender legs by which it clung to the rocky surface. There was something about the body that was monstrous, strangely revolting. In its listening, reconnoitering attitude and the shape of its head was something more monstrous still, since it carried with it a vague, incredible suggestion of humanness.

Suddenly the scarlet shape slipped down the rock breast and raced with that same amazing speed through the grasses toward where Graydon watched. An instant later there burst out of the forest what at first glance he took for a pack of immense hunting dogs—then realized that whatever they

might be, dogs they certainly were not. They came forward in great leaps that reminded him of the motion of kangaroos. And as they leaped they glittered in the sun with flashes of green and blue as though armored in mail made of emeralds and sapphires.

Nor did ever dogs give tongue as they did. They hissed as they ran, shrilly, stridently, the devilish undertones accentuated—a monstrous, ear piercing sibilation that drowned all other sounds and struck across the nerves with fingers of unfamiliar primeval terror.

The scarlet thing darted to right, to left, frantically; then crouched at the base of another monolith, motionless.

And now, out of the forest, burst another shape. Like the questing creatures, this glittered too but with sparkles of black as though its body was cased in polished jet. Its bulk was that of a giant draft horse, but its neck was long and reptilian. At the base of that neck, astride it, he saw plainly the figure of—a man!

A dozen leaps and it was close behind the glittering pack, now nosing and circling between the first monolith and the woods.

"The Xinli," came Suarra's voice from above him.

The Xinli? It was the name she had given the beasts of the bracelet that held in their paws the disk of the Snake Mother!

The dinosaurs!

His own burro lay close beside him. With trembling hand he reached into a saddlebag and drew out his field glasses. He focused them upon the pack. They swam mistily in the lenses, then sharpened into clear outline. Directly in his line of vision, in the center of the lens, was one of the creatures that had come to gaze, that stood rigidly, its side toward him, pointing like a hunting dog. The excellent glasses brought it so closely to him that he could stretch out a hand it seemed, and touch it.

And it was—a dinosaur!

Dwarfed to the size of a Great Dane dog, still there was no mistaking its breed—one of those leaping, upright-walking monstrous lizards that millions of years ago had ruled earth and without whose extinction, so science taught, man

could never have arisen ages later to take possession of this planet. Graydon could see its blunt and spade shaped tail which, with its powerful, pillarlike hind legs, made the tripod upon which it squatted. Its body was nearly erect. It had two forelegs or arms, absurdly short, but muscled as powerfully as those upon which it sat. It held these half curved as though about to clutch. And at their ends were—no paws; no—but broad hands, each ending in four merciless talons, of which one thrust outward like a huge thumb and each of them armed with chisel-like claws, whose edges, he knew, were sharp as scimitars.

What he had taken for mail of sapphire and emerald were the scales of this dwarfed dinosaur. They overlapped one another like the scales upon an armadillo and it was from their burnished blue and green surfaces and edges that the sun rays struck out the jewel glints.

The creature turned its head upon its short, bull-like neck; it seemed to stare straight at Graydon. He glimpsed little fiery red eyes set in a sloping, bony arch of narrow forehead. Its muzzle was shaped like that of a crocodile, but smaller; truncated. Its jaws were closely studded with long, white and pointed fangs. The jaws slavered.

In a split second of time the mind of Graydon took in these details. Then beside the pointing dinosaur leaped the beast of the rider. Swiftly his eyes took it in—true dinosaur this one, too, but ebony scaled, longer tailed, the hind legs more slender and its neck a cylindrical rod five times thicker than the central coil of the giant boa. His eyes flashed from it to the rider.

Instantly Graydon knew him for a man of Suarra's own race—whatever that might be. There was the same ivory whiteness of skin, the same more than classic regularity of feature. The face, like hers, was beautiful, but on it was stamped an inhuman pride and a relentless, indifferent cruelty—equally as inhuman. He wore a close fitting suit of green that clung to him like a glove. His hair was a shining golden that gleamed in the sun with almost the brilliancy of the hunting dinosaurs' scales. He sat upon a light saddle fastened to the

neck of his incredible steed just where the shoulders met it. There were heavy reins that ran to the mouth of the snake-slender, snake-long head of the jetty dinosaur.

Graydon's glasses dropped from a nerveless hand. What manner of people were these who hunted with dinosaurs for dogs and a dinosaur for steed!

His eyes fell to the base of the monolith where had crouched the scarlet thing. It was no longer there. He caught a gleam of crimson in the high grass not a thousand feet from him where he watched. Cautiously the thing was creeping on and on toward the rim. He wondered whether those spider legs could climb it, carry it over the outjutting of the ledge? He shuddered. A deeper dread grew. Could the dinosaur pack scramble or leap over that edge in pursuit? If so—

There came a shrieking clamor like a thousand fumaroles out of which hissed the hate of hell. The pack had found the scent and were leaping down in a glittering green and blue wave.

As they raced the scarlet thing itself leaped up out of the grasses not a hundred yards away.

And Graydon glared at it with a numbing, sick horror at his heart. He heard behind him an incredulous oath from Soames; heard Dancre groan with, he knew, the same horror that held him.

The scarlet thing swayed upon two long and slender legs, its head a full fifteen feet above the ground. High on these stilts of legs was its body, almost round and no larger than a child's. From its shoulders waved four arms, as long and as slender as the legs, eight feet or more in length. They were human arms—but human arms that had been stretched like rubber to thrice their normal length. The hands—or claws—were gleaming white. Body, arms, and legs were covered with a glistening, scarlet silken down.

The head was a human head!

A man's head and a man's face, brown skinned, hawk nosed, the forehead broad and intelligent, the eyes inordinately large, unwinking and filled with soul destroying terror.

A man spider!

A man who by some infernal art had been remodeled into the mechanical semblance of the spinning *Arachnida*, without the stamp of his essential human origin having been wiped away in the process!

Only for a moment the man-spider stood thus revealed. The pack was rushing down upon it like a cloud of dragons. It screamed, one shrill, high pitched, note that wailed like the voice of ultimate agony above the hissing clamor of the pack. It hurled itself, a thunderbolt of scarlet fear, straight toward the rim.

Beneath him, Graydon heard the sounds of frantic scrambling and a scratching. Two hands a full foot long, pallidly shining, shot over the rim of the ledge, gripping it with long fingers that were like blunt needles of bone, horn covered. They clutched and shot forward, behind them a length of spindling scarlet-downed arm.

It was the man-spider, drawing himself over—and the wave of dinosaurs was now almost at the spot from which it had hurled itself at the ledge!

The spell of terror upon Graydon broke.

"A gun," he gasped. "For God's sake, Soames, throw me a gun!"

Against his will, his gaze swept back to those weird, clutching hands. He thought he saw a rod dart out of the air and touch them—the long blue rod he had last seen carried by Suarra's hooded attendant in blue.

Whether he saw it, whether he did not, the needle-fingered claws opened convulsively; released their hold; slid off.

Glittering pack and ebon dinosaur steed alike were hidden from him by the overhang of the shelflike road. But up from that hidden slope came a fiendish, triumphant screaming. An instant later and out into the range of his sight bounded the great black dinosaur, its golden haired rider shouting; behind it leaped the jewel scaled horde. They crossed the plain like a thunder cloud pursued by emerald and sapphire lightnings. They passed into the forest and were gone.

"That danger is over," he heard Suarra say coolly. "Come. We must go on more quickly now."

She stepped out of the tree shadows and came tranquilly to him. Soames and Dan-

cre and Sterrett, white faced and shaking, huddled close behind her. Graydon arose; managed to muster something of his old reckless air. She smiled at him, that half shy approval of him again in her eyes.

"It was just a weaver," she said gently. "We have many such. He tried to escape—or maybe Lantlu opened the door that he might try to escape, so he could hunt him. Lantlu loves to hunt with the Xinli. Or it may be that his weaving went wrong and this was his punishment. At any rate, it is fortunate that he did not gain this road, since if he had, the Xinli and Lantlu would surely have followed. And then—"

She did not end the sentence, but the shrug of her shoulders was eloquent.

"Just a weaver!" Soames broke in, hoarsely. "What do you mean? God in heaven, it had a man's head!"

"It was a man!" gasped Dancre.

"No," she paid no heed to him, speaking still to Graydon. "No—it was no man. At least no man as you are. Long, long ago, it is true, his ancestors were men like you. But not he. He was just—a weaver."

She stepped out upon the path. And Graydon, following, saw waiting there, as quietly, as silently, as tranquilly as though they had not stirred since first he and his companions had fled—the blue cowed and yellow cowed familiars of Suarra. Immobile, they waited while she led forth the white llama. And as she passed Graydon she whispered to him.

"The weaver had no soul. Yu-Atlanchi fashioned him as he was. But remember him—Graydon—when you come to our journey's end!"

She took her place at the head of the little caravan. Blue cowl and yellow paces behind her. Soames touched Graydon, woke him from the stark amaze into which those last words of hers had thrown him.

"Take your old place," said Soames. "We'll follow. Later—we want to talk to you, Graydon. Maybe you can get your guns back—if you're reasonable."

Suarra turned.

"Hurry," she urged; "the sun sinks and we must go quickly. Before to-morrow's noon you shall see your garden of jewels

and the living gold streaming for you to do with it—or the gold to do with you—as you yourselves shall will it.”

They set forth along the rimmed trail.

The plain was silent, deserted. From the far forests came no sound. Graydon, as he walked, strove to fit together in his mind all that swift tragedy he had just beheld and what the girl had told him. A weaver she had called the scarlet thing—and soulless and no man. Once more she had warned him of the power of that hidden, mysterious Yu-Atlanchi. What was it she had told him once before of that power? That it slew souls—or changed them!

A weaver? A man-spider who was soulless but whose ancestors ages ago had been men like himself—so she had said. Did she mean that in that place she called Yu-Atlanchi dwelt those who could reshape not only that unseen dweller in our bodies that we name the soul, but change at will the house of the soul?

A weaver? A spider-man whose arms and legs were slender and long and spider-like—whose hands were like horn-covered needles of bone—whose body was like the round ball of a spider!

And she had said that the scarlet thing might have offended Lantlu by its weaving. Lantlu? The rider of the jetty dinosaur, of course.

A weaver! A picture flashed in his brain, clean cut as though his eyes beheld it. A picture of the scarlet thing in a great web, moving over it with his long and slender legs, clicking his needled hands, a human brain in a superspider's body, weaving, weaving—the very clothing that Suarra herself wore.

A vast hall of giant webs, each with its weaver—man headed, man faced, spider bodied!

Was that true picturing? Suddenly he was sure of it. Nor was it impossible. He knew that Roux, that great French scientist, had taken the eggs of frogs and by manipulating them had produced giant frogs and dwarfs, frogs with two heads and one body, frogs with one head and eight legs, three headed frogs with legs like centipedes.

And other monsters still he had molded from the very stuff of life—monstrous things that were like nothing this earth had ever seen, nightmare things that he had been forced to slay—and quickly.

If Roux had done all this—and he had done it, Graydon knew—then was it not possible for greater scientists to take men and women and by similar means breed—such creatures as the scarlet thing? A man-spider?

Nature herself had given the French scientist the hint upon which his experiments had been based. Nature herself produced from time to time such abnormalities—human monsters marked outwardly and inwardly with the stigmata of the beast, the fish—even of the insect.

In man's long ascent from the speck of primeval jelly on the shallow shores of the first seas, he had worn myriad shapes. And as he moved higher from one shape to another his cousins kept them, becoming during the ages the fish he caught to-day, the horses he rode, the apes he brought from the jungles to amuse him in his cages. Even the spiders that spun in his gardens, the scorpion that scuttled from the tread of his feet, were abysmally distant blood brothers of his, sprung from the ancient Trilobite that in its turn had sprung from forms through which what was to be at last man himself had come.

Yes, had not all life on earth a common origin? Divergent now and myriad formed—man and beast, fish and serpent, lizard and bird, ant and bee and spider—all had once been in those little specks of jelly adrift in the shallow littorals of seas of an earth still warm and pulsating with the first throbs of life. *Protalbio*, he remembered Gregory of Edinburgh had named it—the first stuff of life from which all life was to emerge.

Could the germs of all those shapes that he had worn in his progress to humanity be dormant in man? Waiting for some master hand of science to awaken them, and having awakened, blend them with the shape of man?

Yes! Nature had produced such monstrosities, and unless these shapes had lain dormant and been capable of awakening,

even Nature could not have accomplished it. For even Nature cannot build something out of nothing. Roux had studied that work of hers, dipped down into the crucible of birth and molded there his monsters from these dormant forms, even as had Nature.

Might it not be then that in Yu-Atlanchi dwelt those who knew so well the secrets of evolution that in the laboratories of birth they could create men and women things of any shape desired?

A loom is but a dead machine on which fingers work more or less clumsily. The spider is both machine and living artisan, spinning, weaving, more surely, more exquisitely than could any dead mechanism worked by man. Who had approached the delicacy, the beauty, of the spider's web?

Suddenly Graydon seemed to look into a whole new world of appalling grotesquerie—soulless spider men and spider women spread out over great webs and weaving with needled fingers wondrous fabrics; gigantic soulless ant men and ant women digging, burrowing, mazes of subterranean passages, conduits, *cloaca* for those who had wrought them into being; strange soulless amphibian folk busy about that lake that in his vision had circled up to him before he glimpsed the djinn city.

Phantasmagoria of humanity twinned with Nature's perfect machines while still plastic in the egg!

Came to him remembrance of Suarra's warning of what might await him at journey's end. Had she meant to prepare him for change like this?

Shuddering, he thrust away that nightmare vision!

CHAPTER VI.

THE ELFIN HORNS.

THE sun was halfway down the west when they reached the far end of the plain. Here another ravine cut through the rocky wall, and into it they filed. The trees closed in behind them, shutting out all sight of the bowl and the great circular mountain,

The new trail ran always upward, although at an almost imperceptible grade. Once, looking backward through a rift in the trees, Graydon caught a glimpse of the grassy slopes far beneath. For the rest the tree screened, tree bordered way gave no hint of what lay ahead.

It was close to dusk when they passed out of the trees once more and stood at the edge of a little moor. A barren it was indeed, more than a moor. Its floor was clean white sand and dotted with hillocks, mounds flat topped as though swept by constant brooms of wind. Upon the rounded slopes of these mounds a tall grass grew sparsely. The mounds arose about a hundred feet apart with curious regularity; almost, the fancy came to him, as though they were graves in a cemetery of giants. The little barren covered, he estimated roughly, about five acres. Around its sides the forest clustered. Near by he heard the gurgling of a brook.

Straight across the sands Suarra led them until she had reached a mound close to the center of the barren. Here she halted.

"You will camp here," she said. "Water is close by for you and your animals. You may light a fire. And sleep without fear. By dawn we must be away."

She turned and walked toward another knoll a hundred feet or more away. The white llama followed her. Behind it stalked the silent pair. Graydon had expected Soames to halt her, but he did not. Instead his eyes flashed some crafty message to Dancere and Sterrett. It seemed to Graydon that they were pleased that the girl was not to share their camp; that they welcomed the distance she had put between them.

And their manner to him had changed. They were comrades once more.

"Mind taking the burros over to water?" asked Soames. "We'll get the fire going and chow ready."

He nodded and led the little beasts over to the noisy stream. Taking them back after they had drunk their fill he looked over at the mound to which Suarra had gone. There at its base stood a small square tent, glimmering in the twilight like

silk and fastened to the ground at each corner by a golden peg. Tethered close to it was the white llama, placidly munching grass and grain. Its hampers of woven golden withes were gone. Nor was Suarra or the hooded men visible. They were in the little tent, he supposed, whence they had carried the precious cargo off the llama.

At his own hillock a fire was crackling and supper being prepared. Sterrett jerked a thumb over toward the little tent.

"Got it out of the saddlebags," he said. "Looked like a folded up umbrella and went up like one. Who'd ever think to find anything like that in this wilderness!"

"Lots of things I t'ink in those saddlebags we have not yet seen maybe," whispered Dancre, an eager, covetous light in his eyes.

"You bet," said Soames. "And the loot we have seen's enough to set us all up for life, eh, Graydon?"

"She has promised you much more," answered Graydon. There was an undercurrent of sinister meaning in the New Englander's voice that troubled him.

"Yeah," said Soames, absently. "Yeah. I guess so. But—well, let's eat."

The four sat around the burning sticks as they had done many nights before his quarrel with Sterrett. And to Graydon's perplexity they ignored that weird tragedy of the plain. They pushed it aside, passed it by, seemed to avoid it. Their talk was all of treasure—and of what they would do with it when out of these mountains and back in their own world. Piece by piece they went over the golden hoard in the white llama's packs; gloatingly they discussed Suarra's emeralds and their worth.

"Hell! With just those emeralds none of us'd have to worry!" exclaimed Sterrett.

Graydon listened to them with increasing disquiet. They were mad with the gold lust—but there was something more behind their studied avoidance of the dragging down of the scarlet thing by the dinosaurs, this constant reference to the llama's treasure, the harking back to what ease and comfort and luxury it would bring them all; something lurking unsaid in the minds of the three of them of which all this was but the preliminary.

At last Soames looked at his watch.

"Nearly eight," he said, abruptly. "Dawn breaks about five. Time to talk turkey. Graydon, come up close."

Graydon obeyed, wondering. The four drew into a cluster in the shelter of the knoll. From where they crouched Suarra's tent was hidden—as they were hidden to any watchers in that little silken pavilion looking now like a great golden moth at rest under the moonlight.

"Graydon," began the New Englander, "we've made up our minds on this thing. We're goin' to do it a little different. We're willin' and glad to let by-gones be by-gones. Hell! Here we are, four white men in a bunch of God knows what. White men ought to stick together. Ain't that so?"

Graydon nodded, waiting.

"All right," went on Soames. "Now here's the situation. I don't deny we're up against somethin' I don't know much about. We ain't equipped to go up against anything like that pack of hissin' devils we saw to-day. But—we can come back!"

Again Graydon nodded. They had decided then to go no farther. The lesson of the afternoon had not been lost. Soames would ask Suarra to lead them out of the haunted Cordillera. As for coming back—that was another matter. He would return. But he would come back alone—seek Suarra. Since well he knew no mysterious peril either to life or soul could keep him from her. But first he must see these men safe, wipe off the debt that he believed as one man of his race to another he owed them. He was glad—but the gladness was tempered with sudden doubt. Could the game be finished thus? Would Suarra and that pair of strange old men let them—go?

Soames's next words brought him back to reality.

"There's enough stuff on that llama and the girl to set us all up right, yeah. But there's also enough to finance the greatest little expedition that ever struck the trail for treasure," he was saying. "And that's what we plan doin', Graydon. Get those hampers and all that's in 'em. Get the stuff on the girl. Beat it. An' come back. I'll bet those hissin' devils wouldn't stand up long under a couple of machine guns and

some gas bombs! And when the smoke's cleared away we can lift all we want and go back and sit on the top of the world. What you say to that?"

Graydon fenced.

"How will you get it?" he asked. "How will you get away with it?"

"Easy," Soames bent his head closer. "We got it all planned. There ain't any watch bein' kept in that tent, you can bet on that. They're too sure of us. All right, if you with us, we'll just slip quietly down there. Sterrett and Danc' they'll take care of the old devils. No shootin'. Just slip their knives into their ribs. Me and you'll attend to the girl. We won't hurt her. Just tie her up and gag her. Then we'll stow the stuff on a couple of the burros, get rid of the rest and that damned white beast and beat it quick."

"Beat it where?" asked Graydon, striving to cover the hot anger that welled up in him. He slipped a little closer to Dancre, hand alert to seize the automatic in his pocket.

"We'll get out," replied Soames, confidently. "I've been figurin' out where we are and I saw a peak to the west there both Sterrett and me recognized. Looked like pretty open forest country between us, too. Once we're there I know where we are. And travelin' light and all night we can be well on our way to it by this time tomorrow."

Graydon thrust out a cautious hand, touched Dancre's pocket. The automatic was still there. He would try one last appeal—to fear.

"But, Soames," he urged. "There would be pursuit. What would we do with those brutes you saw to-day on our track. Why, man, they'd be after us in no time. You can't get away with anything like that."

Instantly he realized the weakness of that argument.

"Not a bit of it," Soames grinned evilly. "That's just the point. Nobody's worryin' about that girl. Nobody knows where she is. She was damned anxious not to be seen this afternoon. No, Graydon, I figure she slipped away from her folks to help you out. I take my hat off to you—you

got her sure hooked. Nobody knows where she is, and she don't want nobody to know where she is. The only ones that might raise trouble is the two old devils. And a quick knife in their ribs'll put them out of the runnin' soon enough. Then there's only the girl. She'll be damned glad to show us the way out if chance we do get lost again. But me and Sterrett know that peak. We'll carry her along and when we get where we know we are we'll turn her loose to go home. None the worse off, eh, boys?"

Sterrett and Dancre nodded.

Graydon seemed to consider, fighting still for time. He knew exactly what was in Soames's mind—to use him in the cold blooded murder the three had planned and, once beyond the reach of pursuit, to murder him, too. Nor would they ever allow Suarra to return to tell what they had done. She too, would be slain—after they had done as they willed with her.

"Come on, Graydon," whispered Soames impatiently. "It's a good scheme and we can work it. Are you with us? If you ain't—well—"

His knife glittered in his hand. Simultaneously, Sterrett and Dancre pressed close to him, knife too, in readiness, awaiting his answer.

Their movement had given him the one advantage he needed. He swept his hand down into the Frenchman's pocket, drew out the gun and as he did so, landed a side-wise kick that caught Sterrett squarely in the groin. The giant reeled back.

But before Graydon could cover Soames, Dancre's arms were around his knees, his feet torn from beneath him.

"Suar—" Graydon cried before he was down. At least his shout might waken and warn her. The cry was choked in mid-utterance. Soames's bony hand was at his throat. Down they crashed together.

Graydon reached up, tried to break the strangling clutch. It gave a little, enough to let him gasp in one breath. Instantly he dropped his hold on the New Englander's wrists, hooked the fingers of one hand in the corner of his mouth, pulling with all his strength. There was a sputtering curse from Soames and his hands let

go. Graydon tried to spring to his feet, but one arm of the gaunt man slipped over the back of his head held his neck in the vise of bent elbow against his shoulder.

"Knife him, Danc'," growled Soames.

Graydon suddenly twisted, bringing the New Englander on top of him. He was only in time, for as he did so he saw Dancré strike, the blade barely missing Soames. The latter locked his legs around his, tried to jerk him over in range of the little Frenchman. Graydon sank his teeth in the shoulder so close to him. Soames roared with pain and wrath; threshed and rolled, trying to shake off the agonizing grip. Around them danced Dancré, awaiting a chance to thrust.

There came a bellow from Sterrett:

"The llama! It's running away! The llama!"

Involuntarily, Graydon loosed his jaws. Soames sprang to his feet. Graydon followed on the instant, shoulder up to meet the blow he expected from Dancré.

"Look, Soames, look!" the little Frenchman was pointing. "They have put the hampers back and turned him loose. There he goes—wit' the gold—wit' the jewels!"

Graydon followed the pointing finger. The moon had gathered strength and under its flood the white sands had turned into a silver lake in which the tufted hillocks stood up like tiny islands. Golden hampers on its sides, the llama was flitting across that lake of silver a hundred paces away and headed, apparently, for the trail along which they had come.

"Stop it!" shouted Soames, all else forgotten. "After it, Sterrett! That way, Danc'! I'll head it off!"

They raced out over the shining barren. The llama changed its pace; trotted leisurely to one of the mounds and bounded up to its top.

"Close in! We've got it now," he heard Soames cry. The three ran to the hillock on which the white beast stood looking calmly around. They swarmed up the mound from three sides. Soames and Sterrett he could see; Dancré was hidden by the slope.

As their feet touched the sparse grass a mellow sound rang out, one of those elfin

horns Graydon had heard chorusing so joyously about Suarra that first day. It was answered by others, close, all about. Again the single note. And then the answering chorus swirled toward the hillock of the llama, hovered over it and darted like a shower of winged sounds upon it.

He saw Sterrett stagger as though under some swift shock; whirl knotted arms around him as though to ward off attack!

A moment the giant stood thus, flailing with his arms. Then he cast himself to the ground and rolled down to the sands. Instantly the notes of the elfin horns seemed to swarm away from him, to concentrate around Soames. He had staggered, too, under the unseen attack. But he had thrown himself face downward on the slope of the mound and was doggedly crawling to its top. He held one arm shielding his face.

But shielding against what?

All that Graydon could see was the hillock top, and on it the llama bathed in the moonlight, the giant prone at the foot of the mound and Soames now nearly at its crest. And the horn sounds were ringing, scores upon scores of them, like the horns of a fairy hunt. But what it was that made those sounds he could not see. They were not visible; they cast no shadow.

Yet once he thought he heard a whirling as of hundreds of feathery wings.

Soames had reached the edge of the mound's flat summit. The llama bent its head, contemplating him. Then as he scrambled over that edge, thrust out a hand to grasp its bridle, it flicked about, sprang to the opposite side and leaped down to the sands.

And all that time the clamor of the elfin horns about Soames had never stilled. Graydon saw him wince, strike out, bend his head and guard his eyes as though from a shower of blows. Still he could see nothing. Whatever that attack of the invisible, it did not daunt the New Englander. He sprang across the mound and slid down its side close behind the llama. As he touched the ground Sterrett arose slowly to his feet. The giant stood swaying, half drunkenly, dazed.

The horn notes ceased, abruptly, as

though they had been candlelights blown out by a sudden blast.

Dancré came running around the slope of the hillock. The three stood for a second or two, arguing, gesticulating. And Graydon saw that their shirts were ragged and torn and, as Soames shifted and the moonlight fell upon him, that his face was streaked with blood.

The llama was walking leisurely across the sands, as slowly as though it were tempting them to further pursuit. Strange, too, he thought, how its shape seemed now to stand forth sharply and now to fade almost to a ghostly tenuity. And when it reappeared it was as though the moonbeams thickened, whirled and wove swiftly and spun it from themselves. The llama faded—and then grew again on the silvery warp and woof of the rays like a pattern on an enchanted loom.

Sterrett's hand swept down to his belt. Before he could cover the white beast with the automatic Soames caught his wrist. The New Englander spoke fiercely, wrathfully. Graydon knew that he was warning the giant of the danger of the pistol crack; urging silence.

Then the three scattered, Dancré and Sterrett to the left and right to flank the llama, Soames approaching it with what speed he might without startling it into a run. As he neared it, the animal broke into a gentle lope, heading for another hillock. And, as before, it bounded up through the sparse grass to the top. The three pursued, but as their feet touched the base of the mound once more the mellow horn sounded—menacingly, mockingly. They hesitated. And then Sterrett, breaking from Soames's control, lifted his pistol and fired. The silver llama fell.

"The fool! The damned fool!" groaned Graydon.

The stunned silence that had followed on the heels of the pistol shot was broken by a hurricane of the elfin horns. They swept down upon the three like a tempest. Dancré shrieked and ran toward the camp fire, beating the air wildly as he came. Half-way he fell, writhed and lay still. And Soames and the giant—they, too, were buffeting the air with great blows, ducking,

dodging. The elfin horns were now a ringing, raging tumult—death in their notes!

Sterrett dropped to his knees, arose and lurched away. He fell again close to Dancré's body, covered his head with a last despairing gesture and lay—as still as the little Frenchman. And now Soames went down, fighting to the last.

There on the sands lay the three of them, motionless, struck down by the invisible!

Graydon shook himself into action; leaped forward. He felt a touch upon his shoulder; a tingling numbness ran through every muscle. With difficulty he turned his head. Beside him was the old man in the blue robe, and it had been the touch of his staff that had sent the paralysis through Graydon. The picture of the clutching talons of the spider-man upon the edge of the rimmed road flashed before him. That same rod had then, as he had thought, sent the weird weaver to its death.

Simultaneously, as though at some command, the clamor of the elfin horns lifted from the sands, swirled upward and hung high in air—whimpering, whining, protesting.

He felt a soft hand close around his wrist. Suarrah's hand. Again he forced his reluctant head to turn. She was at his right—and pointing.

On the top of the hillock the white llama was struggling to its feet. A band of crimson ran across its silvery flank, the mark of Sterrett's bullet. The animal swayed for a moment, then limped down the hill.

As it passed Soames it nosed him. The New Englander's head lifted. He tried to rise; fell back. Then with eyes fastened upon the golden panniers he squirmed up on hands and knees and began to crawl on the white llama's tracks.

The beast went slowly, stiffly. It came to Sterrett's body and paused again. And Sterrett's massive head lifted, and he tried to rise, and, failing even as had Soames, began, like him, to crawl behind the animal.

The white llama passed Dancré. He stirred and moved and followed it on knees and hands.

Over the moon soaked sands, back to the camp they trailed—the limping llama, with the blood dripping drop by drop from its

wounded side. Behind it three crawling men, their haggard, burning eyes riveted upon the golden withed panniers, three men who crawled, gasping like fish drawn up to shore. Three broken men, from whose drawn faces glared that soul of greed which was all that gave them strength to drag their bodies over the sands.

CHAPTER VII.

"COME BACK—GRAYDON!"

NOW llama and crawling men had reached the camp. The elfin horn notes were still. Graydon's muscles suddenly relaxed; power of movement returned to him.

With a little cry of pity Surra ran to the white llama's side; caressed it, strove to stanch its blood.

Graydon bent down over the three men. They had collapsed as they had come within the circle of the camp fire. They lay now, huddled, breathing heavily, eyes fast closed. Their clothes had been ripped to ribbons.

And over all their faces, their breasts, their bodies, were scores of small punctures, not deep, their edges clean cut, as though they had been pecked out. Some were still bleeding; in others the blood had dried.

He ran to the rushing brook. Suarra was beside her tent, the llama's head in her arms. He stopped, unbuckled the panniers; let them slip away; probed the animal's wound. The bullet had plowed through the upper left flank without touching the bone, and had come out. He went back to his own camp, drew forth from his bags some medical supplies, returned and bathed and dressed the wound as best he could. He did it all silently, and Suarra was silent, too.

Her eyes were eloquent enough.

This finished, he went again to the other camp. The three men were lying as he left them. They seemed to be in a stupor. He washed their faces of the blood, bathed their stained bodies. He spread blankets and dragged the three up on them. They did not awaken. He wondered at their sleep—or was it coma?

The strange punctures were bad enough,

of course, yet it did not seem to him that these could account for the condition of the men. Certainly they had not lost enough blood to cause unconsciousness. Nor had any arteries been opened, nor was one of the wounds deep enough to have disturbed any vital organ.

He gave up conjecturing, wearily. After all, what was it but one more of the mysteries among which he had been moving. And he had done all he could for the three of them.

Graydon walked away from the fire, threw himself down on the edge of the white sands. There was a foreboding upon him, a sense of doom.

And as he sat there, fighting against the blackness gathering around his spirit, he heard light footsteps and Suarra sank beside him. Her cloudy hair caressed his cheek, her rounded shoulder touched his own. His hand dropped upon hers, covering it. And after a shy moment her fingers moved, then interlaced with his.

"It is the last night—Graydon," she whispered, tremulously. "The last night! And so—they—have let me talk with you a while."

"No!" he caught her to him—fiercely. "There is nothing that can keep me from you now, Suarra, except—death."

"Yes," she said, and thrust him gently away. "Yes—it is the last night. There was a promise—Graydon. A promise that I made. I said that I would save you if I could. I asked the Two Lords. They were amused. They told me that if you could conquer the Face you would be allowed to go. I told them that you would conquer it. And I promised them that after that you would go. And they were more amused, asking me what manner of man you were who had made me believe you could conquer the Face."

"The Face?" questioned Graydon.

"The great Face," she said. "The Face in the Abyss. But of that I may say no more. You must—meet it."

"And these men, too?" he asked. "The men who lie there?"

"They are as already dead," she answered, indifferently. "Dead—and worse. They are already eaten!"

"Eaten!" he cried incredulously.

"Eaten," she repeated. "Eaten—body and soul!"

For a moment she was silent.

"I do not think," she began again. "I did not really think—that even you could conquer the Face. So I went to the Snake Mother—and she, too, laughed. But at the end, as woman to woman—since, after all, she is woman—she promised me to aid you. And then I knew you would be saved, since the Snake Mother far excels the Two Lords in craft and guile. And she promised me—as woman to woman. The Two Lords know nothing of that," she added naively.

Of this, Graydon, remembering the youthful eyes in the old, old faces that had weighed him in the temple of the shifting rays, had his doubts.

"So," she said, "was the bargain made. And so its terms must be fulfilled. You shall escape the Face—Graydon. But you must go."

To that he answered nothing. And after another silence she spoke again, wistfully:

"Is there any maid who loves you—or whom you love—in your own land, Graydon?"

"There is none, Suarra," he answered.

"I believe you," she said simply. "And I would go away with you—if I might. But—they—would not allow it. And if I tried—they would slay you. Yes, even if we should escape—they—would slay you and bring me back. So it cannot be."

He thrilled to that, innocently self-revelant as it was.

"I am weary of Yu-Atlanchi," she went on somberly. "Yes, I am weary of its ancient wisdom and of its treasures and its people who are eternal—eternal at least as the world. I am one of them—and yet I long to go out into the new world—the world where there are babes, and many of them, and the laughter of children, and where life streams passionately, strong and shouting and swiftly—even though it is through the opened doors of Death that it flows. In Yu-Atlanchi those doors are closed—except to those who choose to open them. And life is a still stream, without movement. And there are few babes—and of the laughter of children—little."

"What are your people, Suarra?" he asked.

"The ancient people," she told him. "The most ancient. Ages upon ages ago they came down from the north where they had dwelt for other ages still. They were driven away by the great cold. One day the earth rocked and swung. It was then the great cold came down and the darkness and icy tempests and even the warm seas began to freeze. Their cities, so the legends run, are hidden now under mountains of ice. They journeyed south in their ships, bearing with them the Serpent people who had taught them most of their wisdom—and the Snake Mother is the last daughter of that people. They came to rest here. At that time the sea was close and the mountains had not yet been born. They found here hordes of the Xinli. They were larger, far larger than now. My people subdued them and tamed and bred them to their uses. And here for another age they practiced their arts and their wisdom—and learned more."

"Then there were great earth shakings and the mountains began to lift. Although all their wisdom was not great enough to keep the mountains from being born, it could control their growth around that ancient city, and its plain that were Yu-Atlanchi. Slowly, steadily through another age the mountains arose. Until at last they girdled Yu-Atlanchi like a vast wall—a wall that could never be scaled. Nor did my people care; indeed, it gladdened them, since by then they had closed the doors of death and cared no more to go into the outer world. And so they have dwelt—for other ages more."

Again she was silent, musing. Graydon struggled against his incredulity. A people who had conquered death? A people so old that their birthplace was buried deep beneath eternal ice? And yet, as to the last, at least—why not? Did not science teach that the frozen poles had once basked beneath a tropical sun? Expeditions had found at both of them the fossil forms of gigantic palms, strange animals, a flora and a fauna that could only have lived under tropical conditions.

And did not science believe that long,

long ago the earth had tipped and that thus the frozen poles had come to be?

An inexplicable irritation filled him—inexplicable revolt of the young against the very old.

"If your people are so wise," he questioned, "why do they not come forth and rule this world?"

"But why should they?" she asked in turn. "They have nothing more to learn. If they came forth what could they do but build the rest of the earth into likeness of that part in which they dwell? What use in that, Graydon? None. So they let the years stream by while they dream—the most of them. For they have conquered dream. Through dream they create their own worlds; do therein as they will; live life upon life as they will it. In their dreams they shape world upon world upon world—and each of their worlds is a real world to them. And so they let the years stream by while they live in dream! Why should they go out into this one world when they can create myriads of their own at will?"

Again she was silent.

"But they are barren—the dream makers," she whispered. "Barren! That is why there are few babes and little laughter of children in Yu-Atlanchi. Why should they mate with their kind—these women and men who have lived so long that they have grown weary of all their kind can give them? Why should they mate with their kind when they can create new lovers in dream, new loves and hates! Yea, new emotions, and forms utterly unknown to earth, each as he or she may will. And so they are—barren. Not alone the doors of death, but the doors of life are closed to them—the dream makers!"

"But you—" he began.

"I?" She turned a wistful face to him. "Did I not say that when they closed the doors of death the doors of life closed, too. For these are not really two, but only the two sides of the one door. Some there are always who elect to keep that door open, to live the life that is their own, to have no dealing with—dreams. My father and mother were of these. They took the hazard of death that they might love—

"Ancient arts—ancient wisdom," she went on. "Wisdom that perhaps you have rediscovered and call new. Wisdom you yet may gain. Wisdom that may never be yours—and thank whatever gods you worship that you have not; pray to them that you never may have.

"Such wisdom as shape the—weaver?" he asked.

"That! He was child's play," she answered. "A useful toy. There are far, far stranger things than the weaver in Yu-Atlanchi, Graydon."

"Suarra," he asked abruptly. "Why do you want to save me?"

A moment she hesitated; then:

"Because you make me feel as I have never felt before!" she whispered slowly.

"Because you make me happy—because you make me sorrowful. When I think of you it is like warm wine in my veins. I want both to sing—and to weep. I want your touch—to be close to you. When you go—the world will be darkened—life will be drab."

"Suarra!" he cried—and drew her, unresisting now, to him. His lips sought hers and her lips clung to his. A flame leaped through him. She quivered in his arms; was still.

"I will come back," he whispered. "I will come back, Suarra!"

"Come!" she sobbed. "Come back—Graydon!"

She thrust him from her—leaped to her feet.

"No! No!" she cried. "No—Graydon. I am wicked! No—it would be death for you!"

"As God lives, Suarra," he said, "I will come back to you!"

She trembled; leaned forward, pressed her lips to his, slipped through his arms and ran to the silken pavilion. For an instant she paused there—stretched wistful arms to him; entered and was hidden within its folds.

There seemed to come to him, faintly, heard only by heart—

"Come back! Come back to me!"

He threw himself down where their hands had clasped—where their lips had met. Hour after hour he lay there—thinking,

thinking. His head dropped forward at last.

He carried her into his dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACE IN THE ABYSS.

THE white sands of the barren were wan in the first gleaming of the dawn when Graydon awakened. He arose with the thought of Suarra warm around his heart. Chilling that warmth, swift upon him like a pall fell that bleak consciousness of doom against which he had struggled before he slept; and bleaker, heavier now; not to be denied.

A wind was sweeping down from the heights. Beneath it he shivered. He walked to the hidden brook; doffed clothing; dipped beneath its icy flow. Strength poured back into him at the touch of the chill current.

Returning, he saw Suarra, less than half clad, slipping out of the silken tent. Clearly, she too, was bound for the brook. He waved a hand. She smiled; then long silken lashes covered the midnight eyes; rose-pearl grew her face, her throat, her breasts. She slipped back behind the silken folds.

He turned his head from her; passed on to the camp.

He looked down upon the three—gaunt Soames, little Dancre, giant Sterrett. He stooped and plucked from Soames's belt an automatic—his own. He satisfied himself that it was properly loaded, and thrust it into his pocket. Under Soames's left arm pit was another. He took it out and put it in the holster from which he had withdrawn his. He slipped into Sterrett's a new magazine of cartridges. Dancre's gun was ready for use.

"They'll have their chance, anyway," he said to himself.

He stood over them for a moment; scanned them. The scores of tiny punctures had closed. Their breathing was normal. They seemed to be asleep. And yet—they looked like dead men. Like dead men, livid and wan and bloodless as the pallid sands beneath the growing dawn.

Graydon shuddered; turned his back upon them.

He made coffee; threw together a breakfast; went back to rouse the three. He found Soames sitting up, looking around him, dazedly.

"Come get something to eat, Soames," he said, and gently, for there was a helplessness about the gaunt man that roused his pity—black hearted even as the New Englander had shown himself. Soames looked at him, blankly; then stumbled up and stood staring, as though waiting further command. Graydon leaned down and shook Sterrett by the shoulder. The giant mumbled, opened dull eyes; lurched to his feet. Dancre awakened, whimpering.

As they stood before him—gaunt man, little man, giant—a wonder, a fearful wonder, seized him. For these were not the men he had known. No! What was it that had changed these men so, sapped the life from them until they seemed, even as Suarra had said, already dead?

A verse from the Rime of the Ancient Mariner rang in his ears—

"They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise."

Shuddering again, he led the way to the fire. They followed him, stiffly, mechanically, like automatons. And like automatons they took the steaming coffee from him and drank it; the food and swallowed it. Their eyes, blank, devoid of all expression, followed his every movement.

Graydon studied them, the fear filled wonder growing. They seemed to hear nothing, see nothing—save for their recognition of himself—to be cut off from all the world. Suddenly he became conscious of others near him; turned his head and saw close behind him Suarra and the hooded pair. The eyes of Soames, of Sterrett and of Dancre turned with his own. And now he knew that not even memory had been left them! Blankly, with no recognition—unseeing—they stared at Suarra.

"It is time to start, Graydon," she said softly, her own eyes averted from their dead gaze. "We leave the llama here. It

cannot walk. Take with you only your own animal, your weapons and what belongs to you. The other animals will stay here."

He chilled, for under her words he read both sentence of death and of banishment. Death of all of them perhaps—banishment for him even if he escaped death. In his face she read his heart, accurately; tried to soften his sorrow.

"They may escape," she continued, hastily. "And if they do, the animals will be here awaiting them. And it is well for you to have your own with you, in case—in case—"

She faltered. He shook his head.

"No use, Suarra," he smiled. "I understand."

"Oh, trust me, trust me," she half sobbed. "Do as I say, Graydon."

He said no more. He unhobbled his burro; fixed the saddlebags; took his own rifle and strapped it to them. He picked up the rifles of the others and put them in their hands. They took them, as mechanically as they had the coffee and the food.

Now blue cowl and yellow swung into the lead, Suarra at their heels.

"Come on, Soames," he said. "Come, Sterrett. It's time to start, Dancre."

Obediently they swung upon the trail, marching side by side—gaunt man at left, giant in the center, little man at right. Like marionettes they marched, obediently, unquestioning, without word. If they knew the llama and its treasures were no longer with them, they gave no sign. If they knew Graydon again carried his guns, they gave no sign either.

Another line of the "Rime" echoed in his memory—

"They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—"

Graydon swung in behind them, the patient burro trotting at his side.

They crossed the white sands, entering a broad way stretching through close growing, enormous trees, as though it had once been a road of stone upon whose long deserted surface the leaves had rotted for centuries; upon which turf had formed, but in which no trees had been able to get root hold. And as they went on, he had evidence that it had been actually such a road,

for where there had been washouts the faces of gigantic cut and squared granite blocks were exposed.

For an hour they passed along this ancient buried trail. They emerged from it, abruptly, out upon a broad platform of bare rock. Before them were the walls of a split mountain. Its precipices towered thousands of feet. Between them, like a titanic sword cut, was a rift, a prodigious cleavage which widened as it reached upward as though each side had shrunk away from the splitting blade as it had struck downward. The platform was the threshold of this rift. Fifty feet wide from edge to edge it ran. At each edge stood a small, conical shaped building—temple or guard house—whose crumbling stones were covered with a gray lichen so ancient looking that it might have been withered old Time's own flower.

The cowed figures neither turned nor stopped. They crossed the threshold between the ruined cones; behind them Suarra; and after her, never hesitating, the stiffly marching three. Then over it went Graydon and the burro.

The way led downward at an angle barely saved from difficult steepness. No trees, no vegetation of any kind, could be seen—unless the ancient, gray and dry lichen that covered the road and whispered under their feet could be called vegetation. But it gave resistance, that lichen; made the descent easier. It covered the straight rock walls that arose on each side.

The gorge was dark, as he had expected. The light that fell through its rim thousands of feet overhead was faint. But the gray lichens seemed to take it up and diffuse it. It was no darker than an early northern twilight. Every object was plainly visible.

Down they went and ever down; for half an hour; an hour. Always straight ahead the road stretched, never varying in its width and growing no darker, even the gray lichens lightened it. He estimated its drop was about fifteen feet in the hundred. He looked back and upward along its narrowing vista. They must be, he thought, half a mile or more below the level of the rift threshold.

The road angled. A breast of rock jutted abruptly out of the cliff, stretching from side to side like a barrier. The new road was narrower, barely wide enough for the three marionettes in front to walk on side by side. As they wheeled into it Graydon again felt a pang of pity. They were like doomed men marching to execution; hopeless; helpless and—drugged. Nay—they were men who had once been slain and drawn inexorably on to a second death!

Never speaking, never turning, with mechanical swing of feet, rifles held slack in limp arms, their march was a *grotesquerie* tinged with horror.

The new road was darker than the old. He had an uneasy feeling that the rocks were closing high over his head; that what they were entering was a tunnel. The gray lichens rapidly dwindled on walls and underfoot. As they dwindled, so did the light.

At last the gray lichens ceased to be. He moved through a half darkness in which barely could he see, save as shadows, those who went before.

And now he was sure that the rocks had closed overhead, burying them. He fought against a choking oppression that came with the knowledge.

And yet—it was not so dark, after all. Strange, he thought, strange that there should be light at all in this covered way—and stranger still was that light itself. It seemed to be in the air—to be of the air. It came neither from walls nor roof. It seemed to filter in, creeping, along the tunnel from some source far ahead. A light that was as though it came from radiant atoms, infinitely small, that shed their rays as they floated slowly by.

Thicker grew these luminous atoms whose radiance only, and not their bodies, could be perceived by the eye. Lighter and lighter grew the way.

Again, and as abruptly as before, it turned.

They stood within a cavern that was like a great square auditorium to some gigantic stage; the interior of a cube of rock whose four sides, whose roof a hundred feet overhead, and whose floor were smooth and straight as though trued by giant spirit level and by plane.

And at his right dropped a vast curtain—a curtain of solid rock lifted a foot above the floor and drawn aside at the far end for a quarter of its sweep. From beneath it and from the side, streamed the radiant atoms whose slow drift down the tunnel had filled it with its ever increasing luminosity.

They streamed from beneath it and around the side, swiftly now, like countless swarms of fireflies, each carrying a lamp of diamond light.

"There"—Suarra pointed to the rocky curtain's edge—"there lies your way. Beyond it is that place I promised I would show you—the place where the jewels grow like fruit in a garden and the living gold flows forth. Here we will wait you. Now go."

Long Graydon looked at that curtain and at the streaming radiant atoms pouring from beyond it. Gaunt man, little man, giant man stood, beside him, soulless faces staring at him—awaiting his command, his movement.

In the hooded pair he sensed a cynical amusement—in yellow cowl, at least. For blue cowl seemed but to wait—as though—as though even now he knew what the issue must be. Were they baiting him, he wondered; playing him for their amusement? What would happen if he were to refuse to go farther; refuse to walk around the edge of that lifted curtain; summon the three and march them back to the little camp in the barren? Would they go? Would they be allowed to go?

He looked at Suarra. In her eyes of midnight velvet was sorrow, a sorrow unutterable; despair and agony—and love!

Whatever moved that pair she called the Two Lords—in her, at least, was no cynical gaming with human souls. And he remembered her promise—that he could look upon the Face and conquer it.

Well, he would not retreat now, even if they would let him. He would accept no largess at the hands of this pair who, or so it now seemed to him, looked upon her as a child who must be taught what futile thing it was that she had picked for chosen toy. He would not shame himself—nor her.

"Wait here," he spoke to the three staring ones. "Wait here—do you understand

Soames—Dancré—Sterrett! Do not move! Wait here until I come back."

They only stared on at him; unanswering either with tongue or face.

"Stay here!" he repeated sharply.

He walked up to the hooded pair.

"To hell with you!" he said, clearly and as coldly as he felt they themselves might speak were they to open those silent lips of theirs. "Do you understand that? I said to hell with you!"

They did not move. He caught Suarra in his arms; kissed her; suddenly reckless of them. He felt her lips cling to his.

"Remember!" he whispered. "I will come back to you!"

He strode over to the curtain's edge, swinging his automatic as he went. He strode past the edge and full into the rush of the radiance. For perhaps a dozen heart beats he stood there, motionless, turned to stone, blank incredulity stamped deep upon his face. And then the revolver dropped from nerveless hand; clattered upon floor of stone.

For Graydon looked into a vast cavern filled with the diamonded atoms, throbbing with a dazzling light that yet was crystalline clear. The cavern was like a gigantic hollow globe that had been cut in two, and one half cast away. It was from its curving walls that the luminosity streamed, and these walls were jetty black and polished like mirrors, and the rays that issued from them seemed to come from infinite depths within them, darting through them with prodigious speed—like rays shot up through inconceivable depths of black water, beneath which in some unknown firmament, blazed a sun of diamond incandescence.

And out of these curving walls, hanging to them like the grapes of precious jewels in the enchanted vineyards of the Paradise of El-Shiraz, like flowers in a garden of the King of the Djinn, grew clustered gems!

Great crystals, *cabochon* and edged, globular and angled, alive under that jubilant light with the very soul of fire that is the lure of jewel. Rubies that glowed with every rubrous tint from that clear scarlet that is sunlight streaming through the finny tips of delicate maids to deepest sullen reds of bruised hearts; sapphires that shone

with blues as rare as that beneath the bluebird's wings and blues as deep as those which darken beneath the creamy crest of the Gulf Stream's crisping waves; huge emeralds that gleamed now with the peacock verdancies of tropic shallows, and now were green as the depths of a jungle glade; diamonds that glittered with irised fires or shot forth showers of rainbowed rays; great burning opals; gems burning with amethystine flames; unknown jewels whose unfamiliar beauty checked the heart with wonder.

But it was not the clustered jewels within this chamber of radiance that had released the grip of his hand upon the automatic; turned him into stone.

It was—the Face!

From where he stood a flight of Cyclopean steps ran down a hundred feet or more into the heart of the cavern. At their left was the semiglobe of gemmed and glittering rock. At their right was—space!

An abyss, whose other side he could not see, but which fell sheer away from the stairway in bottomless depth upon depth.

The Face looked at him from the far side of this cavern. Its eyes were level with his. Bodiless, its chin rested upon the floor a little beyond the last monolithic step. It was carved out of the same black rock as the walls, but within it was no faintest sparkle of the darting luminescences.

It was man's face and devil's face in one; Luciferian; arrogant; ruthless. Colossal, thirty yards or more in width from ear to ear, it bent a little over the abyss, as though listening. Upon the broad brow power was throned, an evil and imperial power—power that could have been godlike in beneficence had it so willed, but which had chosen instead the lot of Satan. The nose was harpy curved, vulture bridged and cruel. Merciless was the huge mouth, the lips full and lecherous; the corners cynically drooping.

Upon all its carved features was stamped the very secret soul of humanity's insatiable, eternal hunger for gold. Greed and avarice were graven there—and spendthrift recklessness and callous waste. It was the golden lust given voice of stone. It promised, it lured, it threatened, it cajoled. And it—summoned!

He looked into the eyes of the Face, a hundred feet above the chin. They were made of pale blue crystals, cold as the glint of the Polar ice. Within them was centered all the Face's demoniac strength.

And as Graydon glared into their chill depths swift visions passed from them to his own. Ravishing of cities and looting of ships; men drunk with greed wresting great golden nuggets from the breast of earth; men crouching like spiders in the hearts of shining yellow webs and gloating over hordes of golden flies.

He heard the shouts of loot crazed legions sacking golden capitols; the shouting of all Argonauts since first gold and men were born. And he thrilled to their clamor; answered it with shoutings of his own!

Poured into him from the cold eyes other visions—visions of what gold, gold without end, could do for him. Flaming lures of power over men and nations, power limitless and ruthless as that which sat upon the Face's own brow—fair women—earthly Paradises—Fata Morganas of the senses.

There was a fire in his blood, a Satanic ecstasy, a flaming recklessness.

Why—the Face was not of stone! The eyes were not cold jewels!

The Face was living!

And it was promising him this world and dominion over all this world—if he would but come to it!

He took a step down the stairway.

There came to him Suarra's heartbroken cry!

It checked him.

He looked again at the colossal Face.

And now he saw that all the darting luminous atoms from the curving walls were concentrated upon it. It threw them back, into the chamber and under and past the curtain of rock, and out into the abyss. And that there was a great circlet of gold around the Face's brow—a wide, deep crown almost like a cap. From that crown, like drops of yellow blood, great globes of gold fell slowly! They crept sluggishly down the cheeks.

From the eyes ran slowly other huge golden drops—like tears.

And out of each down turned corner of the mouth the gold dripped like slaver!

The drops of golden sweat, the golden tears, the golden slaver rolled and joined a rivulet of gold that crept out from behind the Face, crawled sluggishly to the verge of the abyss and over its lip into the unfathomable depths—

"Look into my eyes! Look into my eyes!"

The command came to him—imperious, not to be disobeyed. It seemed to him that the Face had spoken it. He stared again straight into the cold blue crystals. And forgotten now was its horror. All that he knew was—its promise!

Graydon dropped to the second step, then to the third. He wanted to run on, straight to that gigantic mask of black rock that sweated, wept and slavered gold, take from it what it had offered—give it whatever it should demand in return—

He was thrust aside. Reeled and caught himself at the very edge of the stairway.

Past him rushed the three—gaunt man, giant man and little man.

He caught a glimpse of their faces. There was no blankness in them now, no vagueness. No, they were as men reborn. Their eyes were burning bright. And upon the face of each was set the stamp of the Face—its arrogance, its avarice, its recklessness and its cruelty.

Faster, faster they ran down the steps—rushing to the gigantic Face and what it had promised them. As it had promised—him!

Rage, murderous and confusing, shook him. By Heaven, they couldn't get away with that! Earth and the dominion of earth! They were his own for the taking. The Face had promised them to him first. He would kill them.

He leaped down behind them;

Something caught his feet, pinioned them, wrapped itself around his knees; brought him to an abrupt halt. He heard a sharp hissing. Raging, cursing, he looked down. Around his ankles, around his knees, were the coils of a white serpent. It bound him tightly, like a rope. Its head was level with his heart and its eyes looked unwinkingly into his.

For a breathless moment revulsion shook him, an instinctive and panic terror. He

forgot the Face—forgot the three. The white serpent's head swayed; then shot forward, its gaze fastened upon something beyond him. Graydon's gaze followed its own.

He saw—the Snake Mother!

At one and the same time real and unreal, she lay stretched out upon the radiant air, her shining lengths half coiled. She lay within the air directly between him and the Face. He saw her—and yet plainly through her he could see all that weird cavern and all that it held. Her purple eyes were intent upon him.

And instantly his rage and all that fiery poison of golden lust that had poured into him—were wiped away. In their place flowed contrition, shame, a vast thankfulness.

He remembered—Suarra!

Through this phantom of the Snake Mother—if phantom it was—he stared full and fearlessly into the eyes of the Face. And their spell was broken. All that Graydon saw now was its rapacity, its ruthlessness and its horror.

The white serpent loosed its coils; released him! Slipped away. The phantom of the Snake Mother vanished.

Trembling, he looked down the stairway. The three men were at its end. They were running—running toward the Face. In the crystalline luminosity they stood out like moving figures cut from black cardboard. They were flattened by it—three outlines, sharp as silhouettes cut from black paper. Lank and gaunt silhouette, giant silhouette and little one, they ran side by side. And now they were at the point of the huge chin. He watched them pause there for an instant, striking at each other, each trying to push the others away. Then as one, and as though answering some summons irresistible, they began to climb up the cliffed chin of the Face—climbing Graydon knew up to the cold blue eyes and what those eyes had seemed to promise.

Now they were in the full focus of the driving rays, the storm of the luminous atoms. For an instant they stood out, still like three men cut from cardboard a little darker than the black stone.

Then they seemed to gray, their outlines

to grow misty—nebulous. They ceased their climbing. They writhed as though in sudden intolerable agony.

They faded out!

Where they had been there hovered for a breath something like three wisps of stained cloud.

The wisps dissolved—like mist.

In their place stood out three glistening droplets of gold!

Sluggishly the three droplets began to roll down the Face. They drew together and became one. They dripped slowly down to the crawling golden stream, were merged with it—were carried to the lip of the abyss—

And over into the gulf!

From high over that gulf came a burst of the elfin horns. And now, in that strange light, Graydon saw at last what it was that sent forth these notes—what it was that had beaten out on the moonlit barren the souls of the three; breaking them; turning them into dead men walking.

Their bodies were serpents, sinuous, writhing and coiling, silver scaled. But they were serpents—winged. They dipped and drifted and eddied on snowy long feathered wings, blanched, phosphorescent plumes fringed like the tails of ghostly Birds of Paradise.

Large and small, some the size of the great python, some no longer than the little *fer-de-lance*, they writhed and coiled and spun through the sparkling air above the abyss, trumpeting triumphantly, calling to each other with their voices like elfin horns.

Fencing joyously with each other with bills that were like thin, straight swords!

Winged serpents, Paradise plumed, whose bills were sharp rapiers. Winged serpents sending forth their pæans of fairy trumpets while that crawling stream of which Soames — Dancre — Sterrett—were now a part dripped, dripped, slowly, so slowly, down into the unfathomable void.

Graydon fell upon the great step, sick in every nerve and fiber of his being. He crept up the next, and the next—rolled over the last, past the edge of the rocky curtain, out of the brilliancy of the diamonded light and the sight of the Face and that trumpet clamor of the flying serpents.

He saw Suarra, flying to him, eyes wild with gladness.

Then he seemed to sink through wave after wave of darkness into oblivion.

CHAPTER IX.

"I AM GOING BACK TO HER!"

GRAYDON awakened.

"Suarra! Beloved!" he whispered, and stretched out eager arms.

Memory rushed back to him; he leaped to his feet, stared around him. He was in a dim forest glade. Beside him his burro nibbled placidly the grass.

"Suarra!" he cried again loudly.

A figure stirred in the shadow; came toward him. It was an Indian, but one of a type Graydon had never seen before. His features were delicate, fine. He wore a corselet and kilt of padded yellow silk. There was a circlet of gold upon his head and bracelets of the same metal on his upper arms.

The Indian held out a package wrapped in silk. He opened it. Within it was Suarra's bracelet of the dinosaurs and the *caraquenque* feather she wore when first he had seen her.

Graydon restored the feather in its covering, thrust it into the pocket over his heart. The bracelet, and why he did it he never knew, he slipped over his own wrist.

He spoke to the Indian in the Aymara. He smiled; shook his head. Nor did he seem to understand any of the half dozen other dialects that Graydon tried. He pointed to the burro and then ahead. Graydon knew that he was telling him that he must go, and that he would show him the way.

They set forth. He tried to etch every foot of the path upon his memory, planning already for return. In a little while they came to the edge of a steep hill. Here the Indian paused, pointing down. Fifty feet or so below him Graydon saw a well marked trail. There was an easy descent, zigzagging down the hillside to it. Again the Indian pointed, and he realized that he was indicating which way to take upon the lower trail.

The Indian stood aside, bowed low and waited for him to pass down with the burro. He began the downward climb. The Indian stood watching him; and as Graydon reached a turn in the trail, he waved his hand in farewell and slipped back into the forest.

Graydon plodded slowly on for perhaps a mile farther. There he waited for an hour. Then he turned resolutely back; retraced his way to the hillside and driving his burro before him, quietly re climbed it.

In his brain and in his heart were but one thought and one desire—to return to Suarra. No matter what the peril—to go back to her.

He slipped over the edge of the hill and stood there for a moment, listening. He heard nothing. He pushed ahead of the burro; softly bade it follow; strode forward.

Instantly close above his head he heard a horn note sound, menacing, angry. There was a whirring of great wings.

Instinctively he threw up his arm. It was the one upon which he had slipped Suarra's bracelet. As he raised it, the purple stones that were the eyes of the snake-woman carved upon it, flashed in the sun.

He heard the horn note again, protesting; curiously—startled. There was a whistling flurry in the air close beside him as of some unseen winged creature striving frantically to check its flight.

Something struck the bracelet a glancing blow. He felt another sharp blow against his shoulder. A searing pain darted through the muscles. He felt blood gush from shoulder and neck. The buffet threw him backward. He fell and rolled over the edge of the hill and down its side.

In that fall his head struck a stone, stunning him. When he came to his senses he was lying at the foot of the slope, with the burro standing beside him. He must have lain there unconscious for considerable time, for the stained ground showed that he had lost much blood. The wound was in an awkward place for examination, but so far as he could see it was a clean puncture that had passed like a rapier thrust through the upper shoulder and out at the neck. It must have missed the artery by a hair.

And well he knew what had made that sound. One of the feathered serpents of the abyss.

The cliff or hill marked no doubt the limits of Yu-Atlanchi at that point. Had the strange Indian placed the creature there in anticipation of his return, or had it been one of those "Watchers" of whom Suarra had spoken and this frontier one of its regular points of observation? The latter, he was inclined to think, for the Indian had unquestionably been friendly.

And did not the bracelet and the *caraquenne* feather show that he had been Suarra's own messenger?

But Graydon could not go back, into the unknown perils, with such a wound. He must find help. That night the fever took him. The next day he met some friendly Indians. They ministered to him as best they could. But the fever grew worse and the wound a torment. He made up his mind to press on to Chupan, the nearest village where he might find better help than the Indians could give him.

He had stumbled on to Chupan, reached it on his last strength.

* * * * *

Such was Graydon's story.

If you ask me whether I believe it, or whether I think it the vagaries of a fever-stricken wanderer, I answer—I do believe it. Yes, from the first to the last, I believe it true. For remember, I saw his wound, I saw the bracelet of the dinosaurs and I listened to Graydon in his delirium. A man does not tell precisely the same things in the cool blood of health that he raves of in delirium, not at least if these things are but fancies born of that delirium. He cannot. He forgets.

There was one thing that I found it hard to explain by any normal process.

"You say you saw this—well, Being—you call the Snake Mother as a phantom in that cavern of the Face?" I asked. "But are you sure of that, Graydon? Are you sure that this was not hallucination—or some vision of your fever that you carried into waking?"

"No," he said. "No. I am very sure. I would not call what I saw a phantom. I

only used that word to describe it. It was more—a projection of her image. You forget, don't you, that other exercise of this inexplicable power of projection the night I was drawn into Yu-Atlanchi by her eyes? Well—of the reality of that first experience there cannot be the slightest doubt. I do not find the other more unbelievable than it.

"The cavern of the Face," he went on, thoughtfully. "That I think was a laboratory of Nature, a gigantic crucible where under certain rays of light a natural transmutation of one element into another took place.

Within the rock, out of which the Face was carved, was some mineral which under these rays was transformed into gold. A purely chemical process of which our race itself is not far from learning the secret, as you know.

"The Face! I think that it was an afterthought of some genius of Yu-Atlanchi: He had taken the rock, worked upon it and symbolized so accurately man's universal hunger for gold, that inevitably he who looked upon it responded to its call. The sub-consciousness, the consciousness, too, leaped out in response to what the Face portrayed with such tremendous power. In proportion to the strength of that hunger, so was the strength of the response. Like calls to like the world over."

"But do you think that Soames and Sterrett and little Dancre really turned into gold?" I asked him.

"Frankly, of that I have my doubts," he answered. "It looked so. But the whole scene was so—well, so damnably devilish—that I can't quite trust to my impressions of that. It is possible that something else occurred. Unquestionably the concentration of the rays on the region about the Face was terrific. Beneath the bombardment of those radiant particles of force—whatever they were—the bodies of the three may simply have disintegrated. The droplets of gold may have been oozing from the rock behind them and their position in the exact place where the three disappeared may also have been only a vivid coincidence."

"That the flying serpents were visible in

that light and not in normal light shows, I should think, that it must have been extraordinarily rich in the ultraviolet vibrations," I suggested.

He nodded.

"Of course that was it," he said. "Invisible in day or night light, it took the violet rays to record their outlines. They are probably a development of some form of flying saurian such as the ancient pterodactyls."

He mused for a moment.

"But they must have possessed a high degree of intelligence," he went on at last; "those serpents. Intelligence higher even than the dog—intelligence perhaps on a par with that of the elephant. The creature that struck me certainly recognized Suarra's bracelet. It was that recognition which checked it, I am sure. It tried to stop its

thrust, but it was too late to do more than divert it.

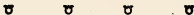
"And that is why I think I am going to find her," he whispered.

"She wanted me to come back. She knew that I would. I think the bracelet is a talisman—or better still, a passport to carry me by the watchers, as she called them. It was not just as a remembrance that she gave it to me. No!"

"I will come back—and with her," he told me on that day we clasped hands in farewell. I watched him until he and the little burro were hidden by the trees of the trail he must follow until he had reached the frontier of the haunted Cordillera, the gateway of those mysteries with which he had determined to grapple to wrest from them the maid he named Suarra.

But he has not come back.

THE END

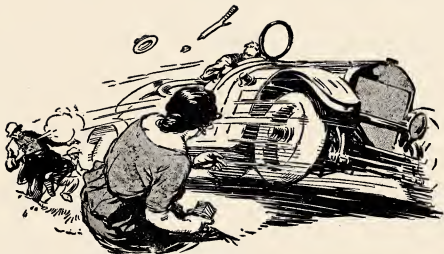


STANZAS

MY life is like the summer rose
That opens to the morning sky,
But ere the shades of evening close
Is scattered on the ground to die!
Yet on the rose's humble bed
The sweetest dews of night are shed,
As if she wept the waste to see—
But none shall weep a tear for me!

My life is like the prints which feet
Have left on ocean's desert strand;
Soon as the rising tide shall beat,
All trace will vanish from the sand.
Yet, as if grieving to efface
All vestige of the human race,
On that lone shore loud moans the sea—
But none, alas! shall mourn for me!

Richard Henry Wilde.



A Month to Live

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

ROLLIN ROSS FOSTER LIVINGSTON, a wealthy idler in his middle thirties, has been given a month to live by doctors who cannot agree on just what is the matter with him. Before he has recovered from this shock, another blow strikes him—MacKintyre, his trusted family lawyer, absconds with his fortune, leaving for Rollin only the old Livingston wheat ranch.

The young invalid starts in his automobile for the ranch, intending to spend his remaining days there. En route he is robbed of his valuables by a bandit. Then his car is stolen while he is in an inn negotiating for a meal with a spare tire. An old tin peddler, who is somewhat of a philosopher, befriends him. Heading toward the ranch on foot, Rollin next day spies his car, newly painted, among the machines in a gypsy encampment. Under pretext of purchasing it he climbs into the driver's seat and then suddenly starts the car.

CHAPTER VI—(continued).

MORE OVER-EXERTION.

SHOUTS and curses behind him. Shadowy forms leaping and running. Women screaming. A shot. A tearing of branches and, amid a shower of leaves and twigs, the lurching car huddled the ditch and hit the road on two wheels.

Rollin and his car were free!

But, even as he reached the road, other engines were roaring behind him. A long,

low racy black craft, manned by dark visaged rovers, was in hot pursuit.

There have been any number of road races in this country, but never one on such a narrow, twisting, up and down, rutty road as this. That road was no wider than the wheel tracks, bounded on both sides by danger, and filled behind with grim death. Not since the red Indians had chased the early settlers up and down the original buffalo path, had there been such a life-and-death race.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 1.

Rollin had been called a reckless driver. But these timid passengers had never ridden with him when he was really reckless!

Doctors had said that he should avoid excitement—and here he was flying down a narrow road nearly fifty miles an hour pursued by a band of brigands. If excitement would have killed him, Rollin would have died every minute of this ride. His pursuers were handicapped by a desire to live, and Rollin knew he couldn't live long anyway, and really had no excuse to live at all. He would have escaped easily enough—only the car ran out of gas! In the very middle of a short but steep hill the sport car slowed down and stopped. There was no time to look for car trouble—another kind was right behind him!—so Rollin leaped out and ran.

The excitement hadn't killed him, but—

He who should not exert was now racing up the hill like an Indian runner, trying to outdistance a fleet of automobiles, and it looked, at first, as though he might do it too, if he could only keep it up! There was no place to hide, no weeds, no shelter—nothing. Just when capture and death seemed about to overtake him, Rollin topped the hill, gasping for breath, and there stood the tin peddler's cart beside the road with its rear doors open! It looked to Rollin like the gates of paradise! Without saying so much as how do you do, Rollin leaped head first into the interior of the cart and disappeared from sight amid a rattle of tinware and a mighty convulsion of rag bags.

The tin peddler calmly closed and locked the doors behind him.

In half a minute the leading pursuer dashed up.

"Where'd he go?" demanded a hoarse voice.

"Who go?" asked the tin man innocently.

"Man go?"

"Went by."

"By?"

"By-by."

"You see him go?"

"Saw him flash—thin fellow—scared—what'd he do?"

"Stole automobile, th—"

Away went the car up the road, black eyes scanning every ditch and weed patch. Then the chief dashed up in a noisy old flivver.

"D'j'u see-a-that feller?" he yelled.

"What fellow?"

"Feller run-a-like hell."

"Heard something whiz by."

"Where?"

"His feet left the ground right here—"

"Fly?"

From the stuffy depths of the tin cart Rollin heard the friendly old driver adding years and years to his enforced stay in purgatory with the ease and nonchalance of a practiced tongue. He described minutely a tall, thin young man dashing up the road and disappearing in the distant woods. The mere fact that a trained racehorse couldn't have made the cover without being seen by its pursuers was a detail he rather hurriedly glossed over. Whereupon the dark complexioned men, having got their newly painted car back anyhow, returned to their camp and proceeded to get away from there directly.

It was then the little old man unlocked the cart doors and called cheerily:

"Come out, little running antelope!"

Rollin backed out, far from gracefully.

"Impersonating the pony express for the movies?"

"Training for the next Marathon," grinned Rollin.

"Why the hurry on such a slow day?"

"As you doubtless perceived, several more or less lawless men were anxious to prove that the doctors were right."

"Right?"

"Said I couldn't live three months!"

"What have you gone and done?"

"Merely tried to get my car back—ran out of gas just below here."

"Oh, so you've lost that again since I saw you?"

"Just a minute or so ago. I just don't seem to be able to keep a car!"

"Have you—er—lost anything else—lately?"

"Yes," nodded Rollin. "My confidence in doctors."

"Oh!"

"They said the slightest exertion and

excitement would drop me dead in my tracks."

"Ah!"

"And here I have been scared out of a year's growth and beaten a Ford in a fair foot race, all within ten minutes, and still live!"

"Ah, well; often we lose things we're better off without," commented the little old man.

"I've certainly lost a great deal lately," sighed Rollin. "And some of it I'd feel better with!"

"Oh, you have?"

"Uh-uh—a comfortable fortune, a good home, a new car, my personal belongings, temper, health, hope of the future and much of my self respect."

"You still have some youth and a bit of life."

"A mere remnant—scheduled to die next month some time."

"Judge or M. D.?"

"The latter, thank God! I'm not actually running away from anything, or anybody."

"Owe anything?"

"Only thanks to you."

"Then, all I got to say, sir, is that you're a heap better off than most folk."

"I—I feel sorry for most folk!"

The tin peddler looked at him very steadily.

"If you're goin' my way climb in and ride."

"Going north," vouchsafed Rollin, "to die on the family acres."

"Oh," said his companion. "Ain't planning to starve to death, be ye?"

"I—I wasn't."

"Then let's eat, what say?"

"Amen," said Rollin.

The old gray mare, not at all what she used to be, plodded slowly along the dusty road. And as the creaking old cart rolled and swayed the aged driver and his new companion sat on the ragged leather cushion, feet on the worn dashboard, and ate heartily of bread and cheese that the driver produced from a hidden recess under the seat.

And as they ate they talked of diverse things.

He proved to be an adroit old peddler, and before Rollin left the cart that evening he had told the little old white whiskered man his entire story, past, present, and future, up to the date set for his demise.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRAW.

IN 1867 Rollin's pioneering grandfather had walked all the way from York State, piloting an ox team, to take—not without resistance by the former copper-colored owners—unto the family those very acres which were now the destination of the grandson now barely a hundred miles away.

Only a hundred miles, and yet it seemed farther to the grandson than a thousand miles had been to his father's father. Granddad lived in a day when walking was not a lost art—when men thought nothing of walking thirty-five miles and back just to try on a suit of clothes.

But those good old days are no more, and Rollin, in common with so many others, had never walked one single step that he could ride—almost! Steam hurried him across continents and seas—gasoline took him from place to place—electricity shot him up and down tall buildings. His legs were not quite useless—he needed them to stand with and for toddling—but he "kicked" only with his tongue and walked not even in his sleep.

But this week Rollin walked.

He didn't do it very willingly, nor gracefully, either. But he walked, and walked—right up the middle of the dusty country road with the hot sun leaning heavily on his stooped shoulders.

He had been duly warned about exposure to the terrific rays of the sun, too! He was specially liable to sunstroke—had a touch of it once. But there wasn't any more shade in most of that country where he was walking than you could find on either side of a barbed wire fence at midday. He might just as well take his sunstroke moving as sitting down. Momentarily he expected a blazing ball of fire to fall right down out of the sky and hit him on the head.

As he walked his mind dwelt longingly on the pleasure of a bath—no, not the white-tiled tepid bath, with a thermometer floating around in it—a cold plunge right into some deep spring hole—cold as all get-out.

His last tub was in strict accordance with the doctor's instructions. The water was exactly the right temperature—his man had seen to that—and it was duly impregnated with certain beneficial salts until it tasted and smelled like an apothecary's shop. The room was heated and steamed up a bit, and a strong man stood hard by with soft towels to rub his anæmic frame into a soft glow.

That's what he got for being one of the rarest of all rare things, in these days of high blood pressure, a man with a *low* blood pressure!

The bath Rollin had in mind just now was not for medicinal purposes, nor solely for sanitation and cleanliness. He was desperate—he wanted to shock his entire system with the coldest of cold water so that every pore would snap shut with an audible sound. They were much too wide open, letting all the moisture within him leak out. He wanted the sticky skin to hump itself into a glorious shivery roughness of goose-flesh, so that he wouldn't be hot again for days and days. For the first time in his adult life he actually needed a bath. He was damp and sticky, and the dust gritted where his clothing touched. If the shock of such a cold bath actually killed him so much the better, because his feet were killing him anyway by the slowest and most painful process known to man.

Welcome a fringe of low trees and bushes in a shallow basin ahead! Thrice welcome the sight of water! Shade and a bath! Heaven hadn't more to offer. His steps quickened. He left the road and found a way through the black alders to a wide pool where the thick bushes would modestly hide his lack of proper bathing apparel.

Soon after this any one passing on the road would have taken a dying oath that a sea lion had found its way up Coulee Creek and was joyfully disporting itself therein. Such splashing, gurgling, puffing, and blowing! Rollin threshed up and

down, he floated about in the cool water and shocked his system as it never had been shocked before. He sat on cold stones, he sank gurgling to the sandy bottom, he had a perfectly lovely time.

Now this same doctor—or was it doctors—who had prescribed the tepid baths, and warned the young man against sudden cold shocks to his delicate subnormal system, had been just as emphatic in his charge—you know he charged—that under no circumstances should Rollin become excited. That is, he should never, never lose his temper no matter what happened. The loss of tranquillity, the first flush of anger, and snap, snap, out would go his light, just like that! He must be very, very careful.

And he had been careful about this. He hadn't lost his temper since he was ten years old. He hadn't been absolutely and downright angry since they took away his teething ring. Never, never had he been so masculinely human as to get even red in the face with anger and not a cross word had crossed his lips since he could pronounce his r's without making them sound like w's. Little did he realize that, having survived—for the moment—the cold bath, he was about to tempt Providence again. He waded ashore to the grassy bank there under the sheltering alders, white and glistening and delightfully cool, with no noticeable effect from his rash deed. Then he gave a little gasping cry, a shocked sort of a throaty gurgle.

No, it wasn't his heart.

It was his clothes.

They were gone!

Not a stitch—coat, pants, hat, shoes, underwear—all, all were gone.

Rollin looked quickly to see that he hadn't got bewildered from swimming on his back and come out on the wrong bank by mistake. No, here was where he had left them—here was where they were not.

"Who think they're so—funny?" he yelled, and there was more than a trace of anger in his voice. "What—"

No answer.

And though he dashed up and down the brush as much as he dared, considering the brevity of his attire, he didn't see any one who thought they were funny or otherwise,

It was then he stepped upon the briery hush.

I tell you, if there had been the slightest bit of truth in what the M. D.s had said to him about losing his temper, this story would have ended right then and there. Nor will the laws of the commonwealth permit the author to give the exact words of Rollin's speech.

He didn't just lose his temper—he threw it away like a thing damned. I guess it was, too! It was truly remarkable that a man who had never used an oath before could recall so many cuss words, and arrange them so neatly in their chronological order on the spur of the moment. He also proved what no one ever suspected before—that he possessed a good creative imagination as well as a retentive memory.

Rollin dove quickly out of sight when he heard a wagon approaching. Thank God, it was the tin peddler again! Who could possibly be more welcome than an old clothes man?

"Hist-t-t-t!" hissed Rollin from his hush screen.

"Peek—I see you," answered the old man, drawing rein.

"I am indeed it," groaned Rollin.

"Why the seclusion—afraid you're friends will see too much of you?"

"I know damn well they will!"

"What are you hiding from?"

"From sight, if you've got to know."

"Oh-ho and wherefore?"

"Some perfidious rascal has stolen my clothes."

"Oh—Adam!"

"Oh, hell!"

"I knew it—I knew it," sighed the old man. "I just knew that some sartorial failure, made desperate by custom clothing advertisements, would steal your clothes the first chance."

"Nothing funny about this—"

"I should say not—ha-ha-ha! It's the saddest thing—ha-ha-ha! It's—"

"I'll hrain you with a stone!"

"Don't be a prude, young man. It's fashionable to be broad and free an' th' nude doesn't offer th' excitement that it did."

"Have you by any chance recently ex-

changed any thin tin tea kettles for ancient masculine garments?"

"Come out, Adam, and let's look."

"Not at me!"

The rag bags were hauled out and searched. Garment by garment Rollin gradually acquired a new suit. Standing there by the cart tail in a loose fitting, hut-tonless undershirt, big enough for the Cardiff giant, Rollin spoke bitterly.

"I have," said he, "a gold filling left."

"Keep your lips sealed and your fortune concealed."

"If you can manage to dig it out I'll willingly give it to you for these clothes and as a fitting reward for your service."

"Seeing you without clothes is reward enough. I feel now as though I owed the government an amusement tax for the entertainment."

"I shall go my way fortified and safeguarded with the knowledge that wherever I go, whatever happens, my tin peddler man will be on hand at the critical moment."

"I hope so."

"It's a comforting thought, especially for one courting death every day."

"How so?"

"By doing the very things all the best doctors of the land said would kill me if I did."

"Oh," said the old man, very wisely.

"I knew a doctor once that was mistaken—and owned up to it."

"No!"

"Get up, an' I'll give you a lift."

Rollin got up. He looked at his new clothes—rags!

"I make a wonderful sign for a tin peddler wagon," he groaned. "My presence here in such a conspicuous place ought to bring you trade."

CHAPTER VIII.

ROLLIN TAKES TO THE RODS.

THE next adventure was with a gay-cat. This sounds a bit like something from Alice, but it wasn't that kind of a cat.

The gay-cat walked upright like a man, but not at all like a man with destiny or

destination ahead; like a man, let us say, going nowhere in particular. His legs lacked the proper swing for this, his body had none of that dogged get-there-soon-or-die. He shuffled along with his head hanging loosely down and his legs flopping. The gay-cat wore a dirty old brown coat, which was too small, and ragged black pants, which were too long and too large. Any one could see that these clothes had been originally designed for two quite different people and never, by any chance, intended for one individual, regardless of his shape.

Anyway, the clothes didn't make much difference to the gay-cat. He was bloated rather than fat and looked, from what you could see of his head and hands, exactly like a man will look who frequents railroads, who rides beneath cars rather than within, and never, never washes, not even on the Saturday night before Christmas.

The gay-cat's name, among the other gay cats, was "Shivver"—incongruous appellation for such a hot day—and the peculiar part of it all was that he actually shivered at times, no matter how hot the weather, and only a bit of "snow," which he sniffed through a bulbous nose, seemed to quiet him! Shivver was not a tramp in the sense that he ever tramped. He never walked one single step if he could help it and his route lay wherever ran the shiny iron rails of any railroad. Like the birds of the air, he migrated northward in summer and southward in winter.

Just now he was plodding along on the hot cinders solely because one of the hired minions, one of the ignorant slaves of a grasping corporation, had unceremoniously kicked him out of a comfortable gondola half a mile back. As soon as Shivver came to a heavy grade, or a water tank, or any place where trains linger or stop—which he hoped to God would be soon—he would rest patiently until another freight came along. Just now he was hot and sticky and ugly and wishing he had tons and tons of dynamite and could blow all the railroads in the country sky high—little realizing that then he would have to walk all the time. But this is the way his kind always reason!

Other little things irritated and annoyed him, now that he was nice and warm. In

the vernacular of the cat family these little things were called seam bunnies and they bit him where he could not reach with his short, fat arms in a tight coat.

To keep his mind from this suffering he began cursing the railroads, which had carried him thousands of miles without a cent of fare, from the grasping, blood-sucking plutocrat who controlled the stock, right down to the district dispatcher who sent along no friendly lifts, including the brass-pounders, the car-knockers and certain other serfs who ride in cabooses for the sole purpose of waving red flags at crossovers and kicking poor folk out of gondolas and box cars.

In the midst of the mental recreation Shivver discovered a man walking down the track ahead of him. With a single leap, like a frightened rabbit, he was behind a pile of new chestnut ties and gave the newcomer an anxious once over.

No railroad dick was ever garbed like that—no rural bull ever was quite so thin.

"Hello, bo," Shivver greeted like a brother.

Rollin stopped and looked at his newly found friend.

"My word!" said he.

They looked each over very carefully. Now clothes, assuredly, do not make the man, I grant you, but they do make it mighty hard to guess what is inside them.

"A No. 1?" asked Rollin.

"Na," grinned Shivver.

"O. K.—going north?"

"Na-a-a."

"Texas Jack—southbound?"

"Say—tryin' to kid me?"

"Oh, no!" sighed Rollin. "I just rather hoped I would meet up with the owner of one of these strange *nom de plumes* I see scribbled all along the right of way."

"Better not let those road kings hear you callin' names," cautioned Shivver. "Them's only their sign, their moniker."

"Well, then, what is your—er—er—"

"Moniker."

Rollin nodded his thanks.

"Shivver," grinned the gay-cat.

"I dare you to—it would cool me off immensely just to see some one shiver."

"It's just a nickname."

"Bestowed by a humorist?"

"Which way you workin'?" asked the gay-cat, avoiding the question for good reason.

"North," said Rollin.

"What for?"

"Going to die up there."

"Can't you do it here an' save all them steps?"

"Could, but I don't want to. Sentimental reasons."

"Oh," purred the cat. "I guess you haven't been hittin' th' grit long."

"Too long."

"What do you suppose these rails are for—eh?"

"Catch suckers in the stock market."

"Partly right. But what I mean is, why don't you ride?"

"Lost my ticket!"

"You've got a lot to learn."

"Too much!"

"You don't look to me as though you'd been fed since trouble started in Ireland."

"It's considerably longer than that—centuries longer!"

"Say, you stick with me," offered the gay-cat. "I'll learn ye a few things. See anything of a water tank back there?"

Rollin nodded.

"How far?"

"Ten thousand miles."

"Well, it's twenty thousand to the one behind me! Come on, we got to make it."

If you wonder why Rollin took up with a tramp just remember that he looked like a tramp himself and in ever so many ways he felt like one. Certainly he was just as hungry, just as tired and just as desperate. Besides Shivver was going to show him how to ride the rods and save thousands of agonizing footsteps in the hot sun. Just at that time Rollin would have welcomed the company of a cannibal and would have tried to ride a wild giraffe.

To "ride the rods" you need a little piece of board—and a mighty courage. Hidden near the water tank were several of these notched boards left by other rod riders. Shivver selected two that were to his liking and they went down the track a way and stretched out in the tall weeds to snooze and wait a freight train that

needed a drink at the tank. Rollin had drunk deep of the tepid water, had bathed hands and face and feet and now he felt better. He slept peacefully until the roar of a freight awakened him.

The long train slowed down and crawled along until the engine tank was opposite the water tower. Then it stopped with a mighty clanking of and thumping of draw-heads.

"Now," said Shivver, "watch us."

He jumped up and ducked under a car, swinging himself by the rods to the rear truck. With his board for a seat he looked quite comfortable.

Rollin ducked under the next car, his heart in his throat with fear that the train might start, and swung somewhat awkwardly into place.

A famous psychologist had warned Rollin to banish fear from his life. So he had banished it. This was easy at the time because the worse fear he had ever encountered heretofore was the fear that he would have to go to his Aunt Abigail's for Thanksgiving. But, no sooner had the noisy old freight started than the rods began to sway and the truck to bump up and down, and Rollin endured an initiation into what fear really is. And when that long string of empties left the high iron and dropped over a hill fear came and gripped Rollin like the coils of a great snake. The road bed began to whiz beneath him. Then it began to leave the right of way and rained up to engulf him. Dust, dirt, sand, cinders beat upon him in a ceaseless storm. The car rocked and swayed, the rods vibrated like fiddle strings, the truck became a gigantic hammer, pounding him to pieces. He had to hang on like grim death, as his senses reeled and his frail body shook with fear.

"Breathe deeply," instructed one doctor. "Let nothing frighten you," cautioned a second. "Beware of nervous shocks," from a third.

How could he breathe at all in that hurricane of ballast? Roaring lions could not have frightened him more, and if his delicate, nervous system could survive this shock—whatever happened he could not get off! On either side spun the noisy, murderous wheels.

Then, as a fitting climax of this thrill, one of the box cars ahead broke a flange and jumped the track. The automatic air did things to both passengers! Rollin survived the first few jolts by hanging on the rods like a monkey, but when the air brakes finally set, with a shower of sparks and a mighty jolt, he was flung down to the ties and rolled under the train. By some miracle he and Shivver escaped the wheels. But when Rollin crawled out he was a sight!

He marveled that fear could go so far and yet not kill a man.

This final climax happened within a few hundreds yards of the hidden brook by the white birches. Shivver led his companion to the familiar and out of the way lair where he announced that he knew how to coax a rabbit out of its hole.

"I envy you your powers of persuasion," answered Rollin. "I couldn't coax a sand-wich out of a kitchen all this A.M."

"Oh, you'll learn," grinned Shivver, "when you get hungry enough!"

"When I get hungry enough!" cried Rollin. "Say, if it should happen to be a skunk, don't throw it away!"

So while Shivver disappeared to coax his rabbit Rollin bathed his sore and aching body in the cool water of the brook, and wished, with all his heart, adventure would leave him alone.

But the Old Man had several good things yet to spring!

CHAPTER IX.

ROLLIN SEES THE JOKE.

NOW we are right back where we started from, which isn't any way to tell a story!

The blond giant called Charlie, and his broad shouldered companion, known as Bad-dee, you will remember, invaded the solitude of this roadside camp that very evening, even while Shivver's easily persuaded rabbit was cooking in tomato cans, and carried away the amateur tramp, as well as the professional, in a rattling old car.

They were not officers of the law picking up vagrants. They had taken the law

unto themselves and were looking for common laborers. They needed help, and they meant to have it. The harvest was ready, the great wheat harvest of the north, and every rancher was desperate enough, in a common labor shortage, to raid an old man's home, or a city club on a Sunday afternoon, to secure the harvest help so badly needed.

Every day the telegraph wires were hot with messages to city employment bureaus, imploring them to send more help. Every night hundreds of rattling old cars were prowling around the country, picking up everything in human shape that could be coaxed or made to work. To these labor hungry men the sight of a tramp was like a waving red flag before the bloodshot eyes of a mad bull.

Any man that wouldn't work—well, well, there are always ways and means! If high wages wouldn't bribe them, then—anyway there are remarkably few tramps at harvest time in the wheat belt!

When Rollin awakened it was dark. He sensed that he was in a bed of sorts, warmly covered, a softness beneath his bones. And thus being much more comfortable than he ever expected to be again, he turned over and made the most of it.

When he awakened again he heard strong men snoring strongly, but where he was he didn't know, and he didn't care either. Who his companions were, gay-cats or gentlemen, he did not wonder. Wasn't he warm and comfortable and sleepy?

The next time he awakened with a start and mayhap a groan or two, dreaming that a great giant was prodding him with a tree trunk. It was just light enough in the room by this time so that he could make out that the giant was only the blond fellow called Charlie.

"Oh, thanks, Big Ben," sighed Rollin.

"Th' days are short, an' th' nights are mere nothing," answered Charlie.

"And seven of them run together make a week, and the weeks multiplied by—"

"You're in th' mob scene—there is no speaking part."

"Where am I?"

"Fear not, good sir, you are among friends."

"I fear as much."

"And if you don't tease them, they'll do you no harm."

"Thanking you kindly, dear friend, for looking after me last night—after breakfast I will be going."

"Going?"

"Gone."

"Whence?"

"Hence."

"Why, my animated shadow, you can't do that."

"No?"

"Never!"

"Have I had a paralyzing shock, or is there something the matter with my legs to interfere with locomotion?"

"No, but you will have a shock if you try it."

"Ha-ha! So you are holding me for ransom!"

"Hardly—for the harvest."

"The what?"

"Wheat and other staple cereals."

"Oh," sighed Rollin, "I'll be a great help to you there."

He flopped back on the bunk, too tired for further argument.

But the big man called Charlie reached out with one powerful sun browned hand and the next instant Rollin was staggering across the floor.

"Cookie," called the blond giant, "stuff this empty to the ears and throw it out—doors in the general direction of the stables."

Rollin did not return to his bunk. From the other bunks came snorts and gasps and muffled cries, and Charlie's great laugh, and men came tumbling out, all in good fun—except Shiver Slater. He refused to get up. He "put up a chatter," and Charlie threw him clean out into the eating room.

"Oh, look," cried Charlie, "I've caught a little wild Bolshevik!"

"You can't never tell what it is until you sandpaper it," said the cookie.

"Feed it," commanded Charlie, "and we'll see if the delicate mechanism can be made to work."

There was nothing about this place to give a hint to Rollin as to where he was. It seemed to be a long room that had been rather hastily turned into a bunkhouse for

nondescript harvest hands. One end of the building had been equipped with double tiers of bunks. There was a table in the center with a large hanging oil lamp over it. There were a few plain chairs—and that was all.

The other end of the room was plainly a combination eating room and kitchen. Here the cookie was busy with pots and pans and a smoking griddle, and the morning air was heavy with the rich and hearty odor of fried ham, of browning griddle cakes, of coffee and fried potatoes.

At the long table were nearly a dozen hard looking men, eating very noisily but enjoying it for all of that. The cookie waved a pancake turner toward an empty seat, and Rollin proceeded without more ado to remedy the emptiness within. Never, in all his born days, had he been so hungry. Such an appetite cannot be dictated to by practitioners and dieticians. What it craved—nay, what it demanded—was food, substantial, rib-sticking food, and oodles of it. If Rollin's favorite family doctor had seen him devour that breakfast he would have swooned long before the horror of the third cup of coffee and the sixteenth flapjack.

This gave him strength to walk out in the direction of the stables. Now, stables, to our Rollin, meant handsome slate-roofed edifices, with quarters for the groom above, with blanketed thoroughbreds, braided tails and manes, bandaged legs and shiny coats, standing deep in clean straw. And a gruff voice saying:

"Son o' 'Umbolt, sir, out o' Lady Addils. She by Roll and Rossmere—"

Another aristocratic delusion was about to be shattered. The stables proved to be a series of corrals, and a long, narrow shed-like building housing the horses and mules. Behind this was a barn and various other farm buildings.

This was no country estate to absorb money. It was a Midwestern ranch, designed and planned to produce money—sometimes!

Rollin walked out of the bunkhouse with a firm step and looked the rising sun right in the face, boldly and for once without a bit of shame. He had not the slightest idea

where he was, but when his gray eyes had swept the wide expanse of country before him he sat right down on a worn chopping block before the bunkhouse door and laughed and laughed and laughed.

Surely old Madam Luck was having her greatest jest right now! He roared until the bunkhouse emptied, until men came running from the barns. The big house in the cottonwood trees, the barns, stables, corrals, the rolling fields and the range of low hills behind, all, were familiar. He knew now exactly where he was—and that was the joke of the whole business.

He was an impressed laborer on his own acres. No wonder he laughed. Shanghaied to his own home! A captured hobo sentenced to hard labor in his own fields!

He roared until the tears streamed down his thin and bewhiskered face.

"It's a wonderful idea of yours, Ed-dee," sneered the blond giant Charlie—"this giving th' patient laughing gas before he begins t' feel th' acute pain of physical exertion."

"Too much yeast in the bread," suggested Ed-die, glaring at the cookie.

"Some one's dropped a raisin in his coffee."

"Laugh, roar, chuckle, chortle, garuff at your heart's content," commanded Charlie. "But do it in th' stable, where you are hereby delegated an' appointed t' do th' necessary chamber work A.M. and P.M., world without end."

"I — *ha-ha*—don't—*he-he*—know—*ha-ha*—a thing about mules."

"Nor nobody else."

"And as for valet de chambering mules—"

"It's no place for a crazy man!"

"Ain't safe to laugh at mules."

"They'd kill him," said Ed-die. "He ain't strong enough in voice nor body."

Charlie walked all around Rollin and looked him over carefully, critically, as he would a new horse.

"It must have been pretty dark when I picked you up."

He looked again.

"You're a living testimony of how badly we need laborers here. You're about the saddest wreck of humanity I ever saw."

"I'm going to die next Tuesday," answered Rollin solemnly.

"I doubt if you live that long! I guess, and Gawd knows I hate to confess it, boys! —I guess I've made a horrible mistake. Cookie, I told you not to use so much brown sugar! Now I've gone an' robbed a hospital somewhere!"

"Better ride him down to the streaks o' rust an' turn him loose. I ain't yearnin' fer him to fall down a post hole and have the crime laid to my door."

"But, but," began Rollin—"I don't want to go."

"What?"

"I desire to stay, to remain, to bide here—"

"An' get fed up at our expense, eh?"

"An' die on us next Tuesday!"

"I thought perhaps there would be something I could do to earn my keep."

"No, no—we've got just about enough clothes poles."

"Must be something I can do."

"He might do th' dustin' up to th' house," suggested one.

"A little plain sewing might not be too strenuous."

Charlie thought for a long time.

"Go to the house," said he, "and see if the women folks need any help. Approach kinda carefully, singing some bit of a tune, so as not to give them too big a scare."

In this way Rollin reached his ancestral home, with five days to amuse himself before he died—accordin' to Dr. Preston Elwyn Pritchard, Dr. Garrick H. Garrison, Dr. Elwin L. Kenton, and others.

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD PLAYMATE.

SO Mac had sold the old ranch after all! Strangers were in the house where he had been born. Some one was cultivating the fields so long neglected. Well, anyway, it was too late to go back—too late to do anything about it, even if he was so minded. His fortune was gone, the homestead was gone—everything—and the last of the Livingstons was going, going. He was only a shanghaied hobo impressed for

the wheat harvest. And worse, and more of it—he was so utterly worthless that, when seen in actual daylight, the foreman had all but actually thrown him off the place.

To leave was to starve to death.

Rollin knew that he was not even a success as a tramp. He rather opined that tramps had to be born that way. Work, when it meant food, rest, clothing, companionship, decency, became instantly attractive. Life, now that he was about to die, became of increasing value.

Deep within, hardly sensed as yet, was something stirring—the manhood within him. He wanted to be a man! Doctors, specialists, sanatoriums—all had tried to make an invalid out of him. Now, he seemed to sense, if given a chance to work out his own salvation, he might survive.

He would be a man!

Rollin approached the familiar old woodshed door, where the bright water flowed forever into a round wet tub, and tapped upon the door jamb, the door being open.

A fat, middle-aged woman of color came to the door.

“Good Lawd!” she gasped. “Is you alive?”

“Just.”

“Who is you?”

“Human derelict.”

“Funny name fer sich a funny man,” she commented. “Where’d you come from?”

“From the place I just left,” smiled Rollin.

“And you’re going to the place you started for, smarty?”

“I’m going to stay.”

“And what do you want here?”

“Something to do,” answered Rollin truthfully. “I’ve just had my breakfast down at the bunkhouse and Charlie said I should help around the house to-day.”

“It’s jest ‘bout time!” she smiled.

“They never think we need help. Miss Lidia! Miss Lidia!” she called.

“Well?” came a pleasant voice from within the house. “What is it?”

“Lord love me, Ah don’t know,” giggled the fat one. “But it says as how it wants t’ help round th’ house.”

Now, Rollin’s disguise was absolutely perfect. His own father, had he been alive, would have had to look for hidden birthmarks to recognize his son. Accustomed from infancy to seeing this man in the cleanest, finest clothes, neatly washed and combed and brushed and scrubbed, who among his friends would know him now?

His face was thin and haggard, covered with a mat of yellowish red whiskers half an inch long. He had no hat and his hair hadn’t been cut in a long time, and it was whirling and curling in wild disorder about his head. His shirt was originally planned to be worn with a collar, but there wasn’t any collar, nor any collar button either. His coat, his trousers—well, the less said about them, the better. They were as clean as he could make them without sentencing the garments for a long term in a laundry. But they were shy of buttons and rich in rents uncollected by thread. His shoes were nice, and broad with hygienic low heels—indeed, one had no heel whatsoever! If Rollin’s narrow feet had ten toes each they would not have been crowded in those shoes—that turned over at the sides and turned up at the toes.

I have a sneaking feeling that at times this young man, dressed by a valet for years and years, took a keen delight in old clothes. And just at this particular minute I know he wished that his whiskers were longer and that his clothes were even older. Because the somehow familiar voice answering to the familiar name of Lidia soon materialized in the open doorway, into no one else but his very own distant cousin, Lidia Foster!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



CONSTANTINOPLE TO BROADWAY

by C. S. MONTANYE, is next week’s Complete Novelette, and a corker for speed and thrills.



The Wooing of the Claw Cat

By JAMES STUART MONTGOMERY

"SINCE our first ancestress lured our common father, Adam, to his ruin it seemeth that every woman who is cursed with a fair countenance is formed to be a vessel of wrath, filled with original sin, hell fire and the perversity of the Evil One himself," thus writes the ancient chronicler, to whom we are indebted for the history of the Duchess de Feuardant, nicknamed the Claw Cat. "The voice of the world, the flesh and the devil ever falls more sweetly on a beautiful woman's ear than does the good counsel of her spiritual advisers. Piety and seemly obedience in maid or wife is to be expected in inverse ratio to her comeliness. But of all women fashioned to be a snare and a pitfall to the feet of man, there is none to match Desirée de Feuardant—nor, I doubt me—ever was."

From which tribute we must judge that the monkish biographer knew either too little of women in general or too much of one woman in particular, and that Desirée was good to look upon.

The wars against the English having, for the time being, burned out for the lack of money and men to feed the flames, we find M. le Duc de Feuardant taking a well earned repose after his arduous years in camp and field, and drinking deep in the wine of the country and also of ennui. And if the devil always finds work for idle hands to do, it is no less true that his chief ally, the rosy mischief making god of love, is no less busy in providing employment for inactive brains. So now this chubby rascal must needs secrete himself in the wine cup of M. le Duc, and here we see Bacchus and Cupid joining forces to fuddle the wits and steal away the peace of mind of this gallant knight and servant of his blessed majesty, the King of France—whom Heaven protect. Amen!

"Heigh ho," says my lord the duke, yawning and turning his pointed beard to the rafters. "'Tis an infernally lonely old barracks this, without a woman in it more comely than the Witch of Endor or younger

than Methuselah's granddam." And so being intensely bored by peace, the duke, who had been a mighty man of valor from his youth up and no ladies' man to speak of, believes his downheartedness to arise from unrequited affection, and wonders within himself who the faithless and cruel fair one may be.

"By the ten thousand hairs of my beard!" cried *monsieur*, striding about until the floor shivered under his great weight, that was all bone and sinew, without enough fat to grease a bowstring. "By the ten thousand hairs of my head, Château Feuardant shall have a chatelaine within the month or I'll raid Gascony, harry Brittany, burn Paris and raise the red banner of rebellion against my lord and master the king—who Heaven protect"—the pious addition being from force of habit.

"Ho, ho!" roared his gossip, the Lord Constable, choking over his flagon of Burgundy till nigh unto apoplexy. "What gad-fly has stung the old war horse that he kicks out the back of his stall and snorts high treason?"

"No wench shall play fast and loose with Feuardant," bellowed the duke, growing red in the face and like to rattle down the stout château with his stamping. "Am I a wishy washy, mealy mouthed dangle after petticoats to be whistled on and shoed off like a pet poodle? Am I a half baked calf to dance attendance on the first heartless minx who throws me a smile and to sigh me at the moon and pine away when she casts me off?"

"Who is this lady who has treated you so cruelly?" asked the Lord Constable, half dead between wine in his windpipe and suppressed laughter in his craw.

"Who is she? Who is she?" shouted the duke. "How in the devil's name do I know?"

For by now my lord duke was, not to put too fine a point on it, drunk, and intensely sorry for himself, without knowing very well why. And drunkenness being but one sort of intoxication and love but another—or, at least, so I think—why might not a man mistake the one folly for the other? Do they not both cause temporary madness and much windy talking and are they not both

often followed by a headache or other unpleasant penance?

"Some woman has deceived you, and yet you know not her name?" asked the Lord Constable.

The duke flings himself into his chair, which creaks and groans, but withstands the shock for all that. Through his brain troops a succession of charmers, whom he has wooed and won or wooed and lost, after the casual manner of a man who has spent more time in saddle and tent than in a lady's bower. But to none of these can he lay his present low spirits.

"It's no great matter," says the Constable. "The heart that one woman can break another can mend."

"That is so," says the duke, comforted somewhat.

"Now this Desirée of Tremaine," says the Constable musingly.

"Who is she?" asks the duke.

"But no, no." The Constable reflects loud enough for the duke's ears. "You could never win her, nor having won her, hold her."

"That could I though she were as fickle as quicksilver," boasts the duke—or the Burgundy which he had been drinking. "Who is she?"

"Women are like provinces. The fairest are ever the hardest to win and the most difficult to hold against interlopers," muses the Constable. "But she is not to be won."

"Though the devil himself were my rival, still would I win her and hold her! Who is she?" The mildest man waxes bold when his success with women is doubted, and my lord duke is no lamb.

"And her name, if it bespeaks her nature, is against her," says the sly Constable. "They call her Claw Cat."

"Excellent and well. I will stroke this claw cat till she purrs like a dove." The duke is a soldier and not a naturalist. "Who is she?"

Then the duke and the Constable put their noses in their flagons and their heads together, and the duke learns much to the credit of the lady as regards her family and her personal appearance, and much to her discredit as concerns her temper and her manners.

The thin hours that follow midnight find my lord duke far gone in wine and far gone in love for a woman, who is, according to all accounts, more beautiful than good. To complete his downfall the unhappy nobleman must needs seek the aid of the third member of that unholy trinity, without which no downfall, we understand, is complete, and bursts into song. Directing his pointed beard heavenward to give greater ease to his mighty throat muscles, he trills as merrily as a thrush in spring-time and as musically as a fat bull of Bashan. But the words of his song we may not here set down. For they are such as soldiers sing about their camp fires and are more to be admired for their wit than for their probity.

Morning—and M. le Duc is pounding away post haste to the bower where dwells the love of his life, although he has never seen her face nor, indeed, so much as heard of her until the evening before. Had he been a stripling of seventeen instead of a well seasoned wine butt of forty, he could not have been more desperately in love with this lady o' dreams, whose image he has set up in his heart. For love is like measles in this, that at no age is a man immune, but it is like to go harder with him after the colt stage.

The father of the fair Desirée was a little gentleman noted for his ancient lineage and of small account besides, except for his having sired the little shrew—the which he regretted—and for his miserly habits. Now, this Sieur Hugo de Tremaine was in a vast flurry when so great a personage as the Duke of Feuardant was announced, but he dissembled his agitation well and awaited patiently until the duke should state his business. The duke, being a man of directness when directness suited his purpose, kept his host waiting only until Feuardant had seen the bottom of his first flagon—no long time with a man of the duke's parts.

"Sieur Hugo," began the duke, "you have a daughter and no need of her. I have no wife and much need of her."

"H-m, h-m!" said Hugo, twisting his sparse chin-beard and squinting his eyes. "My daughter is the prop of my declining years and I am sore loath to part with her."

May the little gentleman be forgiven this great lie! He was loath to part with the handsome dowry which he supposed the suitor would exact as payment for taking the troublesome baggage off his hands.

"And well you might be," rejoined the duke warmly. "For rumor hath it that she is not hard to look upon, and has the disposition of an angel."

"Not hard to look upon! He, he!" chuckled the father. "I have seen women in my day"—and he dug his thumb into his visitor's vest ribs and wagged his old poll wickedly—"but never have I seen a finer—no, nor one half so fine. As for disposition—the child's young yet. A little wayward, a little shy, but—"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared the duke, smiting the little man between the shoulder blades with such might as to dislocate his neck almost. "Ho, ho, ho! Bring her in and let her see how she likes me for a husband."

Thereupon the fair Desirée was sent for, and, much to her father's surprise, and no less to his relief, she came. It may have been filial obedience that brought her so promptly, but more like it was curiosity, of which ladies those days were said to have had their just share.

The duke, upon seeing her, drew a breath so deep that his doublet strained uneasily at its moorings. And well he might; for there stood Desirée in all her sulky beauty. Red was her hair like a well burnished copper kettle and there was enough of it to have made two women happy. Her eyes were neither blue nor gray nor green, but changed with her moods, which were as many and as fickle as the colors of a chameleon, and between the eyes ever so faint a suggestion of a line that stood for temper. A fine curved nostril, that had a trick of quivering, and a short upper lip bespoke many things, but most of all scorn. As to height, her glorious mane could tickle the nose of a tall man and she was more slender than not.

Altogether a girl very dangerous to the peace of man, and much better avoided than sought after.

"Daughter," said her father, "the puissant Duke de Feuardant has done you the honor to ask for your hand."

Desirée swept her suitor with a glance that missed nothing, but dwelt with most disapproval and longest on his boots, which were muddy from hard riding.

"Daughter," repeated her father, "the noble duke has asked for your hand in marriage."

She transferred her gaze from the boots to the pointed beard.

"Daughter—" began her father again.

"I will marry no one," said Desirée, pouting.

"Sieur Hugo," interposed the duke, mightily enamored, but drawing down his bushy brows as if in great anger, "if I may say so without offense—a spoiled child and an ungrateful daughter."

"Yes, yes—a trifle willful, I am afraid. She has sent three suitors packing this fortnight, though they besought her pity with tears. Very gentle and gracious, youths they were."

"Were they so? I would she had been my daughter," says the duke.

"I would she were."

"Or my wife. I would say '*Madame*, do this,' and she would do it; or '*Madame*, do thus,' and she would obey; or—"

"Or what?" My lady speaks, smiling sweetly.

"Or what, mistress?" growls Feuardant. "Oh, by the ten thousand hairs of my beard, in one week I would have you feeding from my hand, and calling me your sweetest lord and master."

"I'd scratch your eyes out. I'd pluck out your foolish beard till you hadn't ten hairs left to swear by!" shrieked Claw Cat, more like a fishwife than a well conducted young lady. In moments of extreme anger it would be often quite possible to confuse the two were it not for their difference in costume.

"All the same, *madame*, it is just as well for your sake that you are not my wife, or you'd sing a different tune."

"I would I were your wife, if only for the pleasure of making your life miserable," shrieked Claw Cat, her eyes quite green.

"As my wife you'd be the most docile and obedient of women."

"Oh," cried Claw Cat, "you great hulking, cowardly, bullying beast! I'd marry

you if you were ten times uglier and stouter and more horrible than you are."

And so Claw Cat walked into the trap. The duke was little of a lady's man, but he'd done a deal of catch as catch can love-making with duchesses and dairy maids, and countesses and gypsies, and it was his opinion that birds of paradise could be trapped with the same corn as silly village geese. But in this he may well have been mistaken.

Little Hugo de Tremaine heaved a sigh of relief and gave his daughter his blessing and his son-in-law-to-be more than one prodigious bumper of very old and heady wine. So Monsieur the Duke rode homeward in a mood befitting a man whose love has been crowned with success. And as he rode he thumped his chest till it resounded like a war drum, and lifting his pointed beard to the new moon he poured forth his soul in melody.

II.

THE marriage of Feuardant to Desirée de Tremaine cost the good knight her father much fine gold, and, because of the gold, many heartfelt sighs; but he was rid at last of his beautiful daughter, which was some consolation to his wounded purse.

At the wedding feast the new made Duchesse de Feuardant sat beside her husband, all smiles and graciousness—to the wonderment of the company.

"Ah, the sweeting!" tittered an old lady to her gossip. "How beautiful she looks! Is not her love for her husband touching?"

At this instant Feuardant started and spilled his wine, for his sweet lady had thrust half an inch of bodkin into his leg. But the old warrior was not one to discover his discomfiture to the enemy.

"Eh, my love?" said he, inclining his ear. "Didst nudge me?" And the remainder of the time passed without further incident except for certain *gaillards* disappearing under the table at intervals in testimony to the excellence of old Tremaine's hospitality.

Now the happy couple arrived at Château Feuardant, and the household which had gathered to welcome their new mistress were dismissed.

"My dove!" cried the duke, and, being greatly in love, he clipped her in his arms and gave her a sounding kiss—the first he had taken.

"My swine!" retorted the lady, being in love not at all, and giving him a sounding buffet on the ear.

"Hussy!" he roared.

"Buffoon!" she shrieked.

And thus was the battle joined.

Monsieur the Duke had a vocabulary garnered in twenty hard campaigns. At his tongue's tip are oaths French, Flemish, German and Spanish. He employs them all, improvising a few now and again as it pleases him and finishing off with a grand cannonade of round British ones as being more mouth filling and satisfying, like their roast beef. Milady is not to be outdone. Her education in the pleasing art of self-expression is more limited, but what she lacks in scope she makes up in flexibility and the accuracy of her metaphor. All this while she is lashing herself to a white hot fury and pacing the floor like a leopardess. And as her wrath rises that of the duke is cooling, until he at last stands silent, with folded arms, regarding her smilingly.

Her foot strikes against a hassock, and the hassock becomes a missile, missing the duke's ear by not a hair's breadth. An hour-glass, a brass candlestick, a prayer book, a vase, a statuette, follow in quick succession. And the duke smiles. Then her ammunition running short, she advances to the attack with bare hands. The duke seizes her wrists, and struggle as she will, she may not release them. His smile is gone and in its place comes a look of bitter disdain.

"Go, girl!" he speaks sternly. "Get thee back to thy father. Thou art no wife of mine." And letting loose his hold, he motions her toward the door and turns his back upon her.

"No wife of yours?" she says, ominously quiet. "No wife of yours? *I am* your wife by book and priest and holy church. I am bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. And oh how those bones shall ache you, and, oh, how that flesh shall smart!"

The duke from the corner of his eyes sees

that she is pulling the pins from her hair and the golden red glory of it billows down about her.

III.

A SERVING wench knocking timidly at the door of their chamber in the morning and receiving no answer, enters and looks about. An overturned chair, a shattered hour-glass, wild havoc and disorder greet her eye. But through the curtains of the great bed of state she glimpses Monsieur le Duc with his pointed beard directed heavenward, and on his great shoulder rests the glorious head of Desirée, nicknamed the Claw Cat.

If the Duke and Duchess de Feuardant did not live the wedded life of two cooing turtle doves, perhaps it was because neither of them desired a surfeit of honey. If he often roused her leopardess's nature, there was ever his strong arms to cage her in till her fury spent itself. If her short upper lip curled in fierce scorn, more than once it could also express very different sentiments.

But as the constable had said: "The fairest province is ever the hardest to hold." The fly in the ointment appeared as a very gaudy insect, in the person of a perfumed, satin clad, and silken tongued Gascon rogue, no older than milady herself—that is, having achieved independence from his leading strings about twenty years. Now, this young man was called Pierre Latouche, and he had a pretty talent with the brush and palette and some small skill in their handling, which he had picked up as apprentice to an Italian dauber. The fair Desirée, having heard of this good youth, who had set up as a portrait painter "after the Italian school," was all for having him transfer her beauty to canvas, and accordingly he was sent for.

Now, the making of a portrait is a fairish long operation, particularly when the artist loves his work—or his model. There must be lengthy periods when the sitter relaxes her position, and what more natural than that these two young people should each find the other's converse agreeable? Master Pierre compliments milady on her beauty, very respectfully, of course, viewing Desirée wholly in the light of a "com-

position" and not as a flesh and blood woman in the least. Incidentally the cunning rascal takes occasion to blow a blast or two on his own trumpet.

"Ah, what hair! Truly would my good friend Titian revel in it. How fortunate is posterity that I, and no other, have the task of immortalizing this glory. For, as Titian has said to me many a time and oft, 'Pierre, two men there are worthy to depict lovely woman's tresses—thou and myself.'"

Or again. "*Madame's* eyes and coloring! What said Angelo—Michael Angelo, *madame*? Maestro Latouche—the great maestro himself, called *me* 'maestro.' When it comes to depicting to the life the delicate peach bloom of a cheek, to catching the swift changing colors of a soft eye—there are but thou and I."

Never had Desirée met so sensible a man and one so appreciative of her qualities. She became graciously condescending. How much gentler his ways than those of the rough Feuardant! Oh, *madame, madame*, what of the three suitors sent packing in a fortnight? Were not they also gentle?

"Does *madame* know these great ones I am naming?" asked Pierre. And *madame* did not. So, much relieved, he gave a full play to his greatest talent, which was not painting.

It would seem that Master Pierre was some hundreds of years older than one would reckon him at first glance. For, according to his own account, his work had been praised by Dante; Phidias and Praxiteles were boon companions of his, and even ancient Homer is called up to testify to the gifted young artist's accomplishments.

All this time the portrait grows slowly and the mutual interest of the pair waxes apace. On the canvas he has depicted a good likeness of Desirée except as regards expression, for he has given a sorrowful droop to the mouth and a mystic quality to the eyes, beautiful, certainly, but hardly true to life.

"It is Desirée de Feuardant and yet not she," said Desirée looking upon her likeness.

"It is your soul, *madame*, which I alone of all men have seen."

"I am afraid my husband will not think it looks like me." And it did not. Desirée was a glorious pagan goddess, no tender Saint Elizabeth as the artist had drawn her.

"Your husband does not understand you. I—I alone have seen your beautiful soul."

Desirée had never before known she had a soul—a weak day soul, that is. Of course on Sundays at mass and during Lent souls were quite usual things.

"I have composed a little song to you. May I sing it?" asked Pierre.

"I would adore hearing it." And Desirée was blushing.

So the youth takes up a lute and sings:

"As the hale man loveth hys flowinge bowle,
And the knyte hys goode bright blade,
As the holy hermit loveth hys soule,
Soe love I thee, sweete mayde.
As the sky larke wings to the rosie morne,
And the whyte gull seeketh the sea,
As the huntsman harks to the merrie horne,
Soe I turne, sweete mayde, to thee.
As the shipman, tossed on a stormie deepe,
Dreams oft of a friendlie shore,
As the waye worne traveler longes for sleepe,
Soe I longe for thee and more."

Set to music it was much prettier than here writ down in cold type. It was full of plaintive little minors, dyings away, and a hundred other tender tricks. There was no need for Pierre to tell Desirée that the song had been composed by a strolling minstrel in honor of a tavern wench, and that the bard had taught it him for the price of a drink.

"But I am wife and no maid," said Desirée seriously.

"Thy soul is maiden, for never has thou given it to thy husband," said Pierre.

And all of an instant they are in each other's arms a clinging and a kissing for the world like two lovers on a Mayday.

They hear a great laugh behind them, and there stands M. le Duc leaning on his tall sword. They spring apart—the youth in a great flutter and Desirée defiant, with green eyes.

"Ho, ho, ho, my pretty love birds," says Feuardant, seemingly enjoying himself immensely. "Cans't wield a sword, young sir?"

"Nay, my lord," says the Gascon with knocking knees. "I have never lifted weapon more deadly than a paint brush."

"Tut, tut. 'Tis pity." The duke strokes his beard reflectively.

"You shall not harm him!" This from Desirée, now all leopardess again.

"I had no thought of harming him," returns the duke, mild as new milk, "since you prefer his caresses to mine. But tell me, why do you?"

"He understands me—you do not."

"I do not understand you, my love?"

"My lord," says Pierre, taking courage, "the lady means that you see her only as a woman, not as an angel."

"That do I confess," says the duke. "I have never discovered her wings."

"Only an artist would have discovered them." And the young man rolls up his eyes and sighs profoundly.

"Then you would take this angel from me?" asks Feuardant.

"Um, aha," the youth falls a stammering, "that is—by your leave, my lord, I—"

Desirée is standing by, gnawing her lip and seemingly none too well pleased.

"And you would go with Master Cock-sparrow?" asks her husband.

The lady pouts and draws her brows together.

"Then, since the cat loves the sparrow and the sparrow loves the cat—heigho and merrily let 'em go together, say I. Treat her tenderly, good Master Meadowlark. She is but a fragile piece." Milord the duke, with that, clasps his hands behind his broad back, and spreading his legs very wide apart, directs his pointed beard ceilingward. The Gascon stands on one foot and then the other, while storm gathers on milady's brow.

"What, my love birds, not flown yet? Have I not opened the cage door?" The duke looks around in surprise.

"Oh," says Desirée in a stifled voice.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh! I thought I had married a man and I have married a clod, a lump, a worm! The meanest hind would fight to the death ere another stole his wife. A drunken tinker would not give up his drab without more ado."

"So, ho," says the duke, "blows the wind from that quarter? You would have steel drawn and blood let, high words and brave gestures? Sir Popinjay here and I must play a pretty romance like those the minstrels sing of, while you stand by uttering timorous shrieks and enjoying the bloodshed. I am cast for the rôle of wronged husband in your puppet show, and Sir Tomtit is to play the gallant lover. We to dance as you pull the strings, and the victor to be rewarded with a kiss from your fair lips while you bind his bleeding wounds. Out upon you, woman! Thinkst that I'll murder a fledgling chick to please your silly vanity? Get thee gone and take thy gosling with thee!"

"Oh," wailed Desirée, beside herself with very fury. "Had I a dagger there'd be murder done!"

The duke drew from his belt a jeweled poignard and presented it to the lady with a low bow. Then he flung himself on a low divan, and seizing the bewildered Gascon by the arm, forced the youth down beside him.

"Now, *madame*." The old warrior tore asunder his doublet, exposing his chest, as shaggy as a bear's, except where an ancient scar traced a jagged white line. "Too often have men done murder for the sake of a worthless woman. If there be butchery here, you shall be your own butcher. Here am I and here is Cock Robin. Choose between us and then strike!"

Desirée stood holding the poignard, her green eyes darting flame and her breast heaving like an angry sea. Pierre, looking on his angel, began to be exceeding unquiet, but the grip of steel on his arm held him to his seat. And while the leopardess crouched for her spring the duke taunted her.

"Remember, my love, when I thrust you from our chamber in your bare feet and very little else, and would not let you in again until you had said '*mea culpa*' thrice? Sir Linnet, here, would never have treated you thus. Do you recall my threatening to beat you and thereby throwing you into a fury, and then trouncing you with a feather, thereby making you more furious still? Ho, ho, ho. Field mouse,

here, would never be aught but gentle, considerate and kind. I have been your master. Master Peascod will be your willing slave. Is it not so, Master Peascod?" Giving the now thoroughly alarmed youth a shake. "He will sing you madrigals and roundelays and other such soft nonsense. He will fetch and carry at your bidding. Oh, he will be your gentle knight, your footstool. Will you not, Master Peascod?" Another shake.

There is a rustle of silken draperies, and the Claw Cat, with upraised dagger, springs toward the divan. With a fearsome yell the young Gascon wrenches his wrist free

of the duke's detaining grasp and is gone. Desirée flings herself upon her husband, while the poignard clatters to the floor, and buries her face in his shoulder, her two arms around his neck.

"Oh, my great ugly bear," says she, sobbing and curling herself on his knees. "I am a very fiend. Beat me, slay me, but put me not from thee!"

M. le Duc directs his pointed beard ceilingward—or perhaps heavenward—and strokes the flaming glory of her hair.

"Nay, my pretty little Claw Cat. Thou art very woman. And I certainly do love thee."



A QUESTION

AS Annie was carrying the baby one day,

Tossing aloft the lump of inanity—

Dear to its father and mother, no doubt,

To the rest of the world a mere lump of humanity—

Sam came along, and was thinking then, maybe,

Full as much of Annie as she of the baby.

"Just look at the baby!" cried Ann, in a flutter,

Giving its locks round her finger a twirl;

"If I was a man I know that I couldn't

Be keeping my hands off a dear little girl."

And Sam gave a wink, as if to say: "Maybe,

Of the girls, I'd rather hug you than the baby!"

"Now kiss it!" she cried, still hugging it closer,

"Its mouth's like the roses the honey-bee sips!"

Sam stooped to obey, and, as heads came together,

There chanced to arise a confusion of lips!

And as it occurred, it might have been, maybe,

That each got a kiss—Sam, Ann, and the baby!

It's hard to tell what just then was the matter,

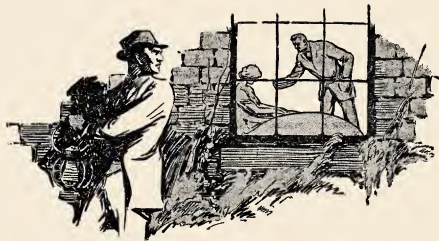
For the baby was the only one innocent there;

And Annie flushed up like a full-blown peony,

And Samuel turned red to the roots of his hair.

So the question is this—you can answer it, maybe—

Did Annie kiss Sam, or did both kiss the baby?



The Man Without Hands.

By LYON MEARSON

Author of "The Lost Hour," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

VAL MORLEY, a wealthy young man, buys one of two bundles of books sold by a beautiful girl in poor circumstances to Mat Masterson, a book dealer. He hopes to learn her name. In a Bible he finds written "Jessica Pomeroy." He is startled to discover in the same book a ten thousand dollar bank note. That night he dreams uneasily of a man without hands. On awakening he finds that he has been chloroformed and the books have been stolen. Returning to the book store, he finds Masterson murdered and the second bundle of books gone. Through the files of a newspaper he discovers Jessica Pomeroy is the daughter of a rich horse owner who died a year before. Locating her, he gives her the ten thousand dollar bill. As he leaves, after arranging to take her to dinner, a man without hands enters the apartment.

Later Val learns from Jessica that Ignace Teck, the handless man, was an employee of her father to whom she is engaged. She tells him she is living in poverty because her father's fortune disappeared at the time of his death, while she was in Europe. Val decides Teck has stolen the books because of some clue to the missing fortune hidden in them. Despite a gang of toughs Teck employs, Val and Eddie Hughes, his servant and former comrade in the trenches, recover the books in a raid on Teck's East Side home. Later Val is knocked senseless by Teck while answering a faked call from Jessica.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WE ARE BOTH GOING!"

THE happiness was effaced from the features of Jessica Pomeroy as a ragged gray cloud wipes out the sun. Gone was her little moment of forgetfulness and returned the everpresent menace. The

moments of conscious happiness in the ordinary life are woefully small and few, little glowing incandescent islands entirely surrounded by cares.

Thought of this dragged through the consciousness of Jessica as the taxicab bore her speedily back to her little flat—the flat where Ignace Teck awaited her. Happi-

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ness, then, was something to be looked at, but not to be seized. It is the soap bubble of life. She remembered that in "Alice in Wonderland" Alice was told that they never have jam to-day; they always have it yesterday or to-morrow—never to-day. Happiness, she decided, was close kin to that jam. Strange, too, how her thoughts of happiness were linked up with the figure of a clean cut young man by the name of Valentine Morley, a man she had spoken to so few times she scarcely knew the sound of his voice. If he could have known.

This is not to say that Val was not making the most of his opportunities. He was not of the type to let opportunity slip, and he was traveling fast. But it is not given to a man to know what goes on inside the head of a young woman during their first few meetings. Who was it said that we are little islands shouting to each other across great seas of misunderstanding? If this were not so would not Val have said "I love you, Jessica," instead of "Good evening, Miss Pomeroy?" He would. Perhaps he will yet. There may be balm in Gotham.

Jessica reread Teck's note as the taxicab shivered along the darkened streets.

Come to your rooms at once. Important!
Don't waste a moment. Will explain when
you arrive. I. T.

This note had broken up her dinner party before it was half over; she had been snatching at her moment of happiness when she received it. The wording of the note had made it imperative that she leave at once; as to the news that awaited her, she had no inkling. She knew only that Teck considered it of supreme importance that she return at once, and, obeying the fear that was always within her where this man was concerned, she was doing so.

Nobody knew the extent of the fear and loathing that the sight of this man Ignace Teck held for her. This was something she held locked in her breast, always remembering that this man had become a loathsome object through his devotion to her. He had sacrificed himself for her, and she considered it but just that she should give herself to him. True, the right

sort of man would have refused to hold her in the bonds of gratitude—but he was Ignace Teck, who was wrapt in no such considerations.

He rose when she entered her living room, and addressed her ungraciously.

"Well, you took your time about coming, I must say."

She regarded him calmly, as always.

"I came as rapidly as possible," she answered. "What is it you wanted?"

He paused for a moment before speaking, and made as if to place the stumps that were his hands on her shoulders. She evaded him with a single motion, as though unconscious of what he had wanted to do. But he looked at her significantly and the angry red mounted into his well-fed countenance.

"You always avoid me, Jessica," he rasped. "Is it on account of my deformity? I know I am no pretty object, but if you will remember, I came by these—"

"I know—I know, Ignace," she broke in hastily. "What is it you wanted to see me about? Something that was so important—"

"That I had to break up a nice little *tête-à-tête* between you and that Morley idiot," he broke in, leering sarcastically. "It would have to be important, of course, to interrupt that. Your relations with this man—"

"My relations with this man are none of your business, Ignace Teck," she broke in. "Don't get the idea that you can order me around as though I belonged to you already. I don't—and I'm not so sure that I ever will—" She paused and looked at him. Her burning eyes spoke the balance of the sentence.

"What do you mean?" he thundered at her. "If Valentine Morley has induced you to—"

"I need nobody to induce me to do what my common sense and my regard for the decencies instructed me long ago should be done," she went on firmly, now that the matter had been begun.

"You promised to marry me—"

"I promised to marry you," she confirmed, interrupting him again, "but the promise is not binding if you are a mur-

derer. Nobody can be held to such a promise and—"

"How dare you say such a thing to me?" he interposed, his voice suddenly calm. The scar across his face was becoming purple, a deep gash across the sallow skin. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"You know very well what I mean," she threw back at him, two spots of color flaring in her cheeks. "I mean that you murdered Matthew Masterson—I know it as though I had been present. It is exactly what you would do—"

"That's a lie!" he interposed a staccato whisper.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't steal the books—"

"Oh, that!" He dismissed it with a wave of a formless wrist. A flicker of feeling shaded its way across his face, expressionless until then, except for that telltale scar. "That was important—I needed them. But as for the bookseller, I deny that I killed him."

"What is there in those books that makes them so important?" she asked, forcing herself to calmness. "I had them here for so long—you could have had them at any time for the asking. But no sooner do I dispose of them than—"

"You will know in good time what there is in the books. To tell you the truth," he whispered confidentially, "I am not exactly sure myself of what there is in them—except—" He trailed off into an expressive silence, and she watched his features unbelievably, knowing that there was more he did not choose to divulge.

"If you think that there is a clew in them concerning the money that was left by my father," she put in finally, "perhaps it will be well to remind you that the money belongs to me. Why should you take it upon yourself—"

"Never mind that," he interrupted harshly. "It concerns me, too. Do you think that after these years of waiting I am going to permit myself to be cast aside by you like a wornout mare in a stable of blooded stock? Think it over carefully, Jessica. Do you think I am the type of man who would permit it?"

She had no answer to this, but there was

the pallor of weariness in her face as she sank down into a soft chair on the opposite side of the room from him.

"I have a way of getting what I go after," he said after a pause, "and nobody knows that better than you—so you might just as well be good."

"Just what do you mean?" she flared. "Am I something that a man can go after—something to be had simply because he has made up his mind that he wants her?"

"Come, come," he smiled. His face was strangely whimsical when he smiled that way, in strange contrast to the sinister appearance of the man when his features were in repose. "Don't be theatrical about it—there is no need for that mask between us, my dear. You have promised to marry me—and when women promise to marry me"—he smiled again—"I always make them stick to their promise. I suppose I'm queer that way, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I can't help it. Life is very peculiar, and we must seize our moments of happiness on the fly."

This was so close to her own thoughts that she could hardly help gasping. She had rather prided herself on that bit of philosophy, but if philosophy was so easy that others could—without effort—think the same things, why, it was scarcely worth while.

"But this business that was so important that you had to call me back to-night—"

"It's just this." He leaned over to her and spoke in a sibilant whisper. "I have rather a straight tip that the police are very close to making an arrest in the Masterson case, and that I had better leave now while the leaving is fairly good."

"But I thought you just said you had nothing to do with the murder of that poor old—"

"I didn't," he answered, "but it might be a bit difficult to prove just at this time. Because I did get the books, you see, so I thought it might be wise for us to go at once—"

"Us?" she inquired, looking at him curiously. "I hardly see why you include me in this affair."

"Because," he said slowly, with a slight,

significant lift of his bushy brows, "if I don't—the police will. They are sure to include you. They know of our relations; if they don't it won't be difficult for them to find out, anyway, and—"

"But this is monstrous!" she ejaculated. "To have you drag me into a mess of this nature when—"

"I didn't, my dear," he interposed calmly, silencing her with a wave of his arm. "It is circumstances that seem to drag you into it, not I. You know, in view of the fact that you sold the books, it will be difficult to keep you out of it—inno-cent as you are—as we are, that is. But if we go away at once—to-night"—he spoke the last word at her in a way that made her shudder—"I have reason to believe we will not be suspected or molested."

"Where are you thinking of going?" she asked quietly.

He shrugged his shoulders and considered for a moment. "Down in Virginia, perhaps—" he suggested.

"Well, go ahead," she threw at him coldly. Her eyes seemed the only live thing in her pale face.

"I'm going," he nodded slowly. "So are you."

He spoke as though this were an accepted fact; as though it needed but for him to enunciate the words to assure her that she was indeed going. It was a matter of fact statement of the future.

"But not with you," she said. "Not to Virginia. I'll go where I please. And moreover, I want you to stay away from my property down there."

"Ah, yes—your property," he acquiesced. "My mortgage—"

"As you know, I have sent down the money to satisfy the mortgage. It is now my property completely, and I don't want you down there. Is that plain?"

He nodded silently and held his peace for a few moments.

"You don't want me down there," he repeated at last, as one who, repeating a lesson by rote, parrots the words almost without knowing what they signify. His shifty eyes contracted.

"No," she reiterated. "I want you to stay away from there."

"Yes, you would," he said. "You are afraid that if the money turns up down there—"

"Whether it turns up or not has nothing to do with you. It is mine, and it's going to stay mine."

He had no answer to this for a few moments. When he rose finally, it was as one who has made his decision, who has planned his course.

"We are both going to Virginia—to-night," he said softly, walking to her in his soft way, lithe as a mountain animal, evil-eyed and treacherous.

She shrank back from his advance and would have screamed, but there was something in his greenish tinged eyes that held her, something horrible that clove her tongue to the roof of her mouth. Pale as death and rigid, she watched him come.

CHAPTER XV.

EDDIE WAKES UP.

EDDIE HUGHES stirred restlessly in his sleep and groaned once or twice, as a restless sleeper sometimes will. He opened his eyes and stared at the blackness of the room. He strained his eardrums and his eyes to their fullest extent. He had a feeling that all was not well.

The house was as silent as the grave; there was absolutely nothing stirring, but Eddie had an oppressed feeling—a feeling that something had gone on there while he was asleep. He had known such a feeling in the trenches—the sensation that something was due to happen, and generally it did happen, a midnight raid or a sudden air attack that was not on the program. That was the sensation he had now, and he gave way to it by arising softly and opening his door quietly. He peered out into the dim light of the hall at the end of which was the closed door of his master's bedroom.

A draft breezed along the hall and made him uncomfortable in his thin pyjamas. A window was open!

He contracted his brows. Of course there were windows open in the apartment, but none that should cause this draft, no

matter how windy it was outside. The inference was plain; somebody had opened a window that was not generally open. His mind traveled instantly back to the time when he had discovered the side window in the living room open—the time when Mr. Morley had been chloroformed.

Silently, noiselessly Eddie crept along the hall, hugging the wall. At the door of the living room he paused, merging himself with the shadows. For a full minute he listened, hearing nothing. If there had been any one there he would surely have heard something—the sound of breathing, a board creaking underfoot, the soft pad of feet across thick rugs. It is not possible to move about in a room without leaving some trace for the auditory sense, some trail of movement. Sounds are comparative things, and the creaking of a board, however slight, is as audible in the stillness of the night as a pistol shot in broad daylight.

Softly Eddie entered the living room. Against the lightened darkness of the window his eye caught the delicate tracery of the lace curtains, not hanging quietly, as was their wont, but blowing inward slightly. He advanced to the window and inspected it. It was open.

He glanced around at the living room, which he could see dimly, now that his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. Nothing was disturbed, nothing had been moved. The room was as it always had been.

But not quite. There was a difference, nothing tangible, nothing that one could put his hand on, but there was a feeling of change in the air, a feeling that some one who did not belong had been there.

He tiptoed out into the hall again and paused for a moment in front of his master's door, listening for the regular breathing that he usually could hear at this time of the night. He heard nothing at all. Eddie had slept soundly through the visit of the chauffeur who had come to bear his master away, and consequently knew nothing of it. He felt there was something alarming in the fact that, along with the open window in the living room, he could not hear his employer breathing.

He placed his hand on the knob and tried it; it opened quietly, and he pushed the door wide suddenly, out of patience with all this early morning mystery and tired of the obvious necessity for quiet. With a swift movement he switched on the light. The bed had not been slept on.

He surveyed the room hastily. Nothing had been disturbed.

"M-mm!" he reflected. "Something phoney about this—window open, Mr. Morley gone. He didn't go through the window, I guess."

He considered this for a brief space, looking around the room for something which he had missed. He stepped quickly into the living room and glanced around quickly in there. His brow contracted in further worry.

The books were gone again.

He could not suppress an amused smile at this. "Like a bloomin' game of 'button, button, who's got the blasted button?'" he commented.

"That mysterious bird's been here again—and gone," he muttered to himself. In the same breath he cursed himself for his careless stupidity.

Of course he had come for the books—it was to be expected; it was positively stupid not to watch out for him. Yet it had not occurred to either of them, somehow. These were not things that happened in everyday life. One did not expect midnight visitors without hands, who came in when you weren't looking and went just as silently. And yet it had occurred. He had come in and taken the books. It was as easy as that.

That being the case, where was his employer? It was not like him to go out again, when once he had come home for the night. In fact, he had told Eddie that he intended to go to bed in a few minutes after he had made a cursory examination of the books. And now he was gone, and an examination proved to Eddie that he had taken his light fall coat and hat. Evidently he had gone of his own free will.

Also, evidently, he had gone before the books had been stolen, because there was no sign of any struggle, and Eddie did not consider it possible that anybody could

come in and gather up those books and make his escape without Mr. Morley's being aware of it.

That led to another train of thought. Probably the intruder knew that he would not be home. That being the case, Eddie carried the idea a little further. Perhaps he had made sure that his employer would not be home by the simple expedient of calling him out on some cock and bull errand.

Where was he now?

"Might 've knew what would happen, soon's he got mixed up with a woman," muttered Eddie. He had disapproved of this from the beginning, simply because there had been a woman in it. Adventures centering about women never do go off according to schedule. There is always something uncomfortable in them. "Female women, blast 'em" he muttered again, and continued pondering upon the present whereabouts of Valentine Morley.

Eddie knew that there was just one kind of a message that could call Valentine out at any time during the night—a message from Jessica Pomeroy—a good looking girl with trouble and sudden death in her eyes, he reflected. He dressed, and, slipping an automatic into his side pocket, went downstairs to interview the night man concerning any visitors with a message that his master might have had after he, Eddie, had retired.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN A BAD PLACE.

NERVOUS but eager, Valentine Morley waited at the altar, his best man a little to one side of him. His heart leaped within him, but there was a scared feeling also that he had never experienced in France.

There was a great burst of music and the thrill of young voices leaping upward to the great vaulted roof, as Jessica Pomeroy and her party appeared at the head of the aisle. Stately the music became and slow, and the procession started down the aisle.

A burst of gladness, a desire to shout

in his joy, coursed through Val as he watched the bewitching picture of the girl who was to be Mrs. Valentine Morley, a girl and yet a woman as she glided down the aisle in solemn time to the music. The procession halted at the altar. A slight perspiration broke out over Val.

"Steady, old boy," came the reassuring voice of the best man in his ear. "No false starts now."

He nodded slightly, strengthened by the well known voice. He heard a little more that was understandable, though a great deal was said. At last he discovered that the minister was saying:

"Do you, Valentine, take this woman to be your lawful wife?"

There was a hush in the great church as all eyes turned toward Valentine Morley. He tried to answer, but something stuck in his throat. Suddenly his throat and mouth were drier than they had ever been.

"Say yes, you dumb-bell!" grated the voice of his best man. "This is no time to change your mind."

Val gulped again. With an extreme effort he spoke.

"I do!" he rasped hoarsely.

"You do what?" inquired a voice in front of him, and he turned to discover the sinister figure of Ignace Teck. The dream vanished instantly.

He gave a gasp of disappointment as he discovered that there was no wedding; that he was lying on a couch in a very uncomfortable position, staring up at the huge figure of the handleless one.

"Go to hell!" he rasped at Teck, annoyed. The change was too great to accept all at once. He stared at Teck a little curiously, half expecting him to dissolve, to disappear like the figures of his dream. But Ignace Teck was doing no disappearing this day.

"Ah, your usual courteous self," he said with his usual suavity.

Val tried to sit up, and found that it was difficult. He needed no glance at his limbs to discover that he was bound hand and foot.

"Stay the way you are," suggested Teck. "You'll find it more comfortable lying down."

Val glanced at as much of the room as he could see. It was a well furnished bedroom. He was lying on a couch at the side. Through the open door he could see a living room which he recognized.

He was in Ignace Teck's apartment.

"To what am I indebted for the honor you pay me?" he inquired of Teck carelessly.

Teck dismissed it with a wave of his hand. "It's nothing—a little game of my own, you know. No trouble to me, I assure you."

"H-m! I suppose not," said Val dryly. "I might have known you would figure somewhere in this, Iggy."

"My name is Ignace—preferably Mr. Teck to you," put in Teck, with dignity.

"Ah, yes, Iggy, you are perfectly right. But why be so formal among friends?" bantered Val. "And, by the way, these cords if yours are hurting my wrists, you know."

"Indeed?" put in Teck politely.

"And, although I can't feel it, I suspect I have rather a large bump on my head," continued Val.

"Indeed you have," Teck assured him. "And you can thank your stars that you still have your head, my lad. If I had followed my own inclinations in the matter—" He paused significantly, but there was no mistaking the meaning of his glance at Val.

"What pleasant ideas you have, Iggy," admired Val. "I must say that must have been a man's sized bump on the bean you handed me, Iggy—"

"I?" expostulated the other. "How could I, with nothing but these—these—" He said no more, but exhibited his handless wrists. "You flatter me, my friend."

"I don't know how you did it—but I guess you have your methods," suggested Val. "Excellent and efficient ones, too."

The other nodded, smiling a trifle. He was in great good humor with himself at the moment. Things were going right. His enemy had been delivered—with a bit of help on his own part—into his hands. He was in a position to draw his teeth—or render his information valueless. He could afford to be a trifle amused and self-satisfied.

"I am glad to hear that you recognize the efficiency of my methods. You realize, perhaps, that I get what I go after. In fact, I might say I never fail," he told Val, who watched him curiously. "I have never failed," he repeated impressively.

"So?" queried Val nonchalantly. "Ah, well, people die to-day who never died before."

The other smiled. "Don't delude yourself. If there's any dying to be done around here, my lad, it isn't going to be me."

He paused and looked at his captive significantly. There was something fearsome about this man, in spite of his assumed pleasant manner, his finely modulated tones. There was an underlying threat in every syllable; in every lithe move of his big body, in every glance of his greenish tinged eyes. On his lips a well bred smile became a leer, and a pleasant word bore a curse beneath the surface. Val was supremely conscious of the fact that here was a man who would stop at nothing to attain his end, whatever that was. Here was a man to whom no villainy was too great if thereby he might achieve that which he desired.

It roused a streak of unreasoning obstinacy in Val, an obstinacy that had often won over his better and more sensible instincts. He was rich; he was young; he was presentable; women liked him; head waiters adored him; his own way had been accorded to him as a matter of course, and it grated on him to find that here was another man who insisted on having his own way, and who usually had it. Well, they would see.

"Just what do you propose to do with me?" he asked. "What is it you wish from me, that you should go to all this trouble—"

"I'll tell you, my friend," put in Teck. "I want your word that you will withdraw from this—er—this affair—you know what I mean—and stay withdrawn. I want you to promise that you will not attempt to communicate with Miss Pomeroy in any way—that you will not continue your acquaintance with her; an acquaintance, by the way, which I warned you would turn

out badly for you. You refused to heed the warning and—"

"And just look at me now," finished Val.

"I also want your word that you will make no mention of anything that has gone before in this affair to any one—"

"Not even the police?" mocked Val.

"Not even the police—though I don't believe you would do that, any way, because the slightest mention of the matter would bring Miss Pomeroy into the lime-light. In a word, I want your promise that you will step out of the lives of myself and Miss Pomeroy at once, and stay stepped out. Have I made myself clear?"

"You have," answered Val. "Why should I promise any such fool thing—and what means have you of forcing me to do it, in case I should refuse?"

"You can promise what I ask because it means that if you do life will be a great deal easier for Miss Pomeroy than it has been since you came into the picture. If you don't—"

"Do you dare to threaten harm to Miss Pomeroy?" grated Val harshly. "By God, if harm comes to her in the slightest way through you I'll carve your liver out, do you hear me? I'll take you apart to see what makes you tick! Don't think for a moment that because you have me trussed up here—"

"Words, my boy, words. Talk is very economical—doesn't cost much. You're not in a position to make any threats, because you're going to promise me that you're going to go out of Miss Pomeroy's life for good."

"And if I don't?"

The other looked at him calmly, dispassionately for a moment, seeming to weigh his words.

"If you don't," he said at length; "ah, yes, if you don't, to be sure. Well, if you don't, you'll have to be—er—removed, that's all. You won't be the first man whose mouth has been sealed by—er—an untimely demise. A pity, too," he said, shaking his head commiseratingly. "You're young, and a rather nice looking boy. Really too nice to have people filing past you and saying sadly, 'Doesn't he look

natural?' Now, you'd better be sensible and do what I ask, because I assure you that I'm not bluffing in the slightest—"

"Aw, go to hell!" interrupted Val, bad temperedly. "I want to get some sleep."

"You'll sleep when I get done with you—perhaps more than you wish," said Teck.

"I want to warn you, too, that you'd better not try to escape, because if you do you'll be killed instantly. O'Hara!" he called out.

"Here y' are, boss," came the answer promptly, and an unshaven, hulking tough came into the room. One of his eyes was beady and black, wicked looking. Probably the other one was, too, normally. At present it was puffed to unholy proportions, and blue. He had a face like a horse, with a large, coarse looking nose and lips and ears laid well back to his closely cropped head.

"Hello, Horseface!" called Val, cheerily. "Did you attend my little party here earlier in the evening? From the appearance of yon weakly glowing orb, I have me suspicions."

"Yes, I wuz here—an' I'll be here when you're gone, cull," answered the one called Horseface.

"Maybe—maybe," said Val. "In the meantime—"

"In the meantime," said Teck, "I just called him in to show you that you're covered—that the slightest move to escape on your part means death. What are your orders, O'Hara, if this man tries to escape or to shout?"

"To pump hot lead into him, that's all, boss," said Horseface with satisfaction. "An' I might add that it will give me pleasure to carry out them orders, too—"

"All right," interrupted Teck, nodding to the door. The tough withdrew to the next room and took up his silent vigil again.

"Nice, pleasant little playmates you have, Iggy, old thing," commented Val. "Must be a great intellectual satisfaction—"

"Intellectual satisfaction will not mean much to you when you greet St. Peter," said Teck with meaning.

"I say," said Val, "I'm awfully thirsty—can I have a drink of water?" As a matter

of fact, his tongue and mouth were parched with thirst. He had been a trifle feverish after the blow on the head he had received, and his throat now felt dry as dust.

"Ah, water, to be sure. I'm thirsty myself," nodded Teck mildly. "O'Hara, bring in a glass of water, will you?"

O'Hara grunted, and in a moment Val heard the sound of running water in the kitchen. In a few moments the horse-faced one brought in a brimming glass.

"Thanks," said Teck. He took the glass between his two maimed wrists and held it before him reflectively. "Surprising how badly one wants water when he wants it," he commented, "isn't it? Now, take you, for instance, Mr. Morley. You'd probably appreciate this humble glass of water, if I should give it to you, wouldn't you? You'd—"

"Don't you intend to give it to me?" asked Val.

The other shook his head, mildly surprised. "Give it to you? Why, I'm thirsty myself."

He drained the glass at a gulp and set it on the table. "Ah, that was good!" He wiped his lips. "There's nothing so good as water when you're thirsty. Think it over, Mr. Morley—you may be thirstier before you get it." He rose.

"You dirty hound!" said Val, exasperated. "Do you mean to torture me?"

The other looked at him, pained. "Torture you? How can you say so, my dear fellow? I, who am the kindest hearted of men? Really, you know, it hurts me to have you say such things of me. All you have to do is to promise what I ask—then I'll give you all the water you want, and your freedom. It isn't much to ask."

"I'll see you in hell first, you snake!" said Val pleasantly, smiling, though his throat felt the need of water now more than before. "Did you think it would be as easy as that?"

The other shook his head. "No, I was afraid it would not be as easy as that. However, you may come to your senses yet. In the meantime, I feel the need of a couple of hours' sleep myself—it's almost daylight. When I wake you can tell me your decision."

"I'm telling it to you now, Iggy," replied Val. "Nothing doing."

Teck shook his head again, but said nothing. He threw himself down on the bed and went to sleep immediately.

In a few moments Val was asleep, too.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MIDNIGHT INVESTIGATION.

EDDIE HUGHES'S interview with the night man confirmed his suspicions.

A taxi chauffeur had called with a personal message for Mr. Morley—a message which he was at pains to deliver personally. And Mr. Morley had gone away with him in the taxicab with no loss of time.

Eddie nodded his head. There was just one thing that would call Valentine Morley out at that time of the night—a message from Miss Pomeroy. She was in trouble, and Mr. Morley had gone to her assistance. Or—and this came to Eddie like a sudden shaft of light—suppose Mr. Morley had been *told* that Miss Pomeroy needed him? Suppose that somebody wanted Mr. Morley out of the way—and conceived this means of removing him?

Having removed him thus, what had they done with him then? That was something for Eddie to find out, supposing his assumption was correct.

Eddie went to the house garage and got out the low, speedy roadster.

"Goin' outta see how the night's holdin' up, me bucko?" inquired the night watchman at the garage.

"Naw," said Eddie. "I'm going out to the park to do Greek dances in the dewy grass, get me? Barefoot stuff, an' flowin' robes, far from the maddenin' throng. Us esthetic guys get that way sometimes, see?"

With a look of disgust the watchman settled back in his seat. "Which the same ain't sayin' that you nor that fool millionaire boss o' yours ain't capable av doin' such," he offered.

"Cheerio!" remarked Eddie with a wave of his hand. He had learned the word in France, having heard British officers use it occasionally, and he lost no opportunity of getting it off.

"Now, don't git them little feetsies av yourn damp, love," called out the watchman after Eddie as the car slid out of the garage. The roadster swept around the corner with a roar and was lost in the darkness in a moment.

If the message from Miss Pomeroy had called his employer out, that, then, was the place to start looking for him. It occurred to Eddie that he might be butting in where he would not be very welcome, but he cast off the thought with a shrug of his broad shoulders. Perhaps. On the other hand, perhaps Mr. Morley needed him.

And if Mr. Morley needed him, hell was not to hot for him to cross, nor the ocean too damp. He would carry on, on the chance of his being useful.

Running his engine as quietly as possible, he drew up at the door of the flat house where Jessica Pomeroy lived. He sat in his seat before the darkened, silent house for a few minutes, deliberating on what his next move should be. Of course, the straightforward move, and the obvious one, was to simply ring Miss Pomeroy's bell and go on up. It was as simple as that.

But actually it was not as easy as all that. One hesitated to ring the bell of a stranger at this time of the night; that is, unless one were very sure of his ground. And Eddie was not any too sure of what he was doing. After all, was it his business?

With a muttered curse on all men who were thick headed enough to get mixed up with female women, Eddie climbed out of the car and entered the vestibule.

He rang the Pomeroy bell and waited for the answering tick. There was none, though he gave the occupants of the Pomeroy flat plenty of time to get out of bed and open the door. He rang again, loudly and insistently this time, but still he got no answer. He rang again, and shook impatiently at the door. It opened, though there was no tick of the electric push button. Like many flat house doors, it was open more often than it was shut.

He peered into the silent gloom of the hall, but could see nothing. On a last chance he rang the bell again, keeping the door open with his foot. There was no answer. Suddenly determined, he entered the

dark hall and made his way upstairs to the Pomeroy flat.

Here he rang the bell loudly and heard it reverberating inside, but there was no answer, and he became convinced that nobody was home. He tried the door, and to his surprise it opened. The lock was not of the spring type, and evidently whoever had charge of such matters had forgotten to turn the key.

"H-m-m, must've been in an awful rush to get out!" muttered Eddie, straining his eyes to see into the apartment. He could see nothing, and resolving to press his luck he entered. He struck a match and lighted the gas in the hall, and from there went into the living room, where he also struck a light.

The place was deserted. He did not need an inspection of the rooms to convince him that there was nobody in the house.

"Nobody alive, that is," he commented to himself.

In one of the bedrooms he found the door of the closet open, and the scattered condition of the clothes, both in the closet and around the room persuaded him that the occupant or occupants had left in a hurry. The dresser top was swept bare of toilet articles, and lying on the floor was a time table.

They had left in a hurry, certainly. So far, so good; but where did his employer come in here? Had he left with them? And if so, where had they gone?

The time table gave him a slight hint. It was of a railroad having its terminus in Norfolk, Virginia. He knew that in Virginia the Pomeroy's had an estate, somewhere outside of Hampton, which is very near Norfolk. Had they gone down there?

Probably. But would Mr. Morley have gone down there with them so suddenly, without leaving with him some word of his travels? He had to admit that, based on past performances, that was unlikely. At any rate, he had never done anything of that nature before.

This led to another train of thought. Was Valentine Morley with Miss Pomeroy? He had decided that his employer had been lured out of his house—certainly it wasn't Miss Pomeroy who had done the luring.

No, it was quite likely that Miss Pomeroy had departed without his master, for the simple reason that his master was somewhere else at the time.

But where? Eddie's brow furrowed in thought. Who would find it necessary or expedient to lure Mr. Morley out of his house? Why, the man who wanted to steal the books. Who was that? Eddie's brow cleared. That was simple; why, the bird without no hands, to be sure. How dumb he had been not to think of that!

Well, he knew where *he* lived, at all events. A visit down there might do no harm, though one had better be careful how he prowled around in that neighborhood. Though, come to think of it, that was rather a glorious fight they had had there earlier in the evening. Eddie's eyes brightened. There was much in this affair he could not understand, but a fight was a fight in any language, and there were few people who enjoyed one better than he. Now, if a man was looking for a fight, where was a better place to go than to the house of Ignace Teck?

Closing the door behind him, Eddie made his way softly downstairs and entered his car. As silently as his engine would permit, he swung out into the center of the roadway and hit the dust for the corner. At the corner he swung the nose of his car down town, in the direction of the residence of Ignace Teck.

Dawn was beginning to break over the sleeping city as Eddie Hughes sped along. In black, bold relief, like the background of an etching, the houses to the east stood out against the slowly rising light. Suddenly the street lamps went out, leaving the city in a tenebrous, gray light that peopled the disappearing shadows with velvet darkness.

The city began to awake. There was the clank of the milkman's bottles, and the clang of the street cleaner's cart. To the east the roar of the Elevated railway punctuated hoarsely the sleep of those within range. Newsdealers appeared on the street corners with the morning edition of some papers and the afternoon and evening editions of certain other sensational papers which shall here be nameless.

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At Spring Street Eddie turned east to the Elevated railway. He did not think it wise to pay his intended visit to Teck in this expensive car. It was not the kind of a neighborhood for that sort of thing, and besides, he did not wish to advertise his interest in the matter. If his employer was anywhere around Teck's rooms, it would be because he couldn't get away; certainly, then, secrecy was a necessity. The way to serve secrecy would be to come on foot, silently, and unobtrusively.

Under the Elevated railway Eddie hunted up an all night garage where he was familiar with the proprietor. He stored his car there, saying that he would be back soon. Then, slipping his hand into his pocket to see that he still had his automatic, he turned his face in the direction of the house of Ignace Teck.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BREAKFAST—FOR ONE.

VAL was awakened by the clatter of plates and eating utensils. The smell of crisp bacon and fried eggs came pleasantly to his nostrils. It was broad daylight, and the sun was streaming into the dingy apartment through the window opposite the couch on which Val lay.

At the table sat Ignace Teck, making a hearty and evidently enjoyable meal, managing his utensils with an awkward cleverness that bespoke many years of doing the same thing. He did it surprisingly well, and Val could see that he ate with almost as little trouble as a man in possession of all his limbs. He held his fork pressed between his two wrists, and was remarkably limber and clever at it.

Val wondered how he went about dressing. One could hold a fork or a knife between his wrists, but how did one button a shirt? That was something that needed fingers and thumbs. How did one put in a collar button—sometimes hard enough for normal persons, even? Val decided that he probably had assistance.

He also decided that, in addition to being abominably thirsty, he was hungry; he knew there was little chance of getting food

here. Yet the fine tang of the sizzling bacon was tantalizing to a man who was bound hand and foot and knew he would probably get no breakfast of any kind.

"I say, you do that rather well, you know," said Val.

The other turned and regarded him pleasantly.

"Oh, you're awake, are you?" he asked, and smiled. "Isn't it funny the useless questions people ask? Now, I can see darn well you're awake—and yet I ask. I guess it's just to be polite."

"Be polite, to be sure," agreed Val. "Let nothing interfere with your good manners. Even when you're committing a murder—just a slight murder, you know, nothing much—do it in a genteel way; be cultured above all things. Remember Gilbert's little poem:

"When the enterprising burglar isn't burgling,
When the cutthroat isn't occupied in crime,
He loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling,
And listen to the merry village chime.
When the coster's finished jumping on his mother,
He loves to lie a-basking in the sun;
Ah, take one consideration with another,
The policeman's lot is not a happy one!"

Teck laughed, and went on eating, not able to reply because his mouth was rather full of toast and bacon and egg.

"Though I suppose it's rather bad form to mention a policeman to you, isn't it?" Val suggested pleasantly. "In the house of the hangman, you know—"

"That's all right; I don't mind, my friend," assured Teck. "Have your little minute, if you wish—it won't be long."

"Smells good," suggested Val hopefully.

"It is good," Teck assured him. "There are very few better cooks than O'Hara, when he isn't—"

"When he isn't engaged in the delightful pastime of assassination, I suppose. I say, is he a union murderer, or does he have to put in more than eight hours a day at manslaughter? This is not mere curiosity, you know; I ask because I am interested in the betterment of conditions for the working classes. Does he have to specialize, or is he permitted to vary his duties by a little burglary—"

"Hope you're enjoying yourself, Mr. Morley," put in Teck tersely. "It's your last chance, you know. Still thirsty?"

"Why? Aren't thinking of giving me food and drink, are you?" Val asked.

The other shook his head. "No," he said regretfully; "it would not be in strict accord with the most elementary principles of economics. Suppose you promise what I ask—what happens? Why, you go free, and in five minutes you are buying your own food at a restaurant. Suppose you don't—what happens?" he asked judicially. "Why, in a short time you won't feel the need of food—it'll be all the same whether you were hungry or whether you were sated—see? That being the case, why should I waste my substance on you?"

"Seems to be O. K.," admitted Val, "always supposing, of course, that your suppositions come through as scheduled. Now, suppose, for instance, that I not only refuse to promise what you wish me to promise, but I also escape. Suppose—"

"Nonsense," Teck shook his head. "You cannot escape. O'Hara is in the next room, and the house is surrounded by—by my friends. You are bound. The slightest noise means that you will be gagged—if necessary, knocked on the head. It hurts me to have to tell you these things, my friend, because I am naturally of a kindly disposition, but—of course," he said with a sigh, "if you make it necessary, why, one must do one's duty, distasteful as it is."

"Sounds all right," said Val. "But this is a civilized city—New York, you know. One doesn't commit a murder and get away with it like that. My—er—body, for instance—"

"Oh, don't give yourself the slightest concern about that," Teck waved the suggestion aside airily. "Don't worry about it, I beg of you. As for the proper disposition of—er—remains, why, we have our own system, and a very efficient one it is, too."

"That's all right then,"* said Val. "Relieves my mind a great deal, you know. One naturally would be concerned about these things—that is, even if one is convinced that you're a damned bluffer, to say nothing of being a liar who would never

have the nerve to carry out the plan you have indicated."

The other looked at him, pained. "My dear boy, I'm sorry you feel it necessary to use such strong language to me. I have not asked much of you—just a promise to withdraw from this affair entirely—an affair that really does not concern you, anyway; surely you can see that in this thing you're nothing but an outsider who has butted into things that are none of his business. Just promise me to keep away from Miss Pomeroy for good, and to—"

"Iggy," said Val, "will you be good enough to go to hell?"

"Ah, still unregenerate, I see." Teck shrugged his shoulders. "Some people never learn. You know, I've been uncommonly gentle up to now. I could easily have spared myself a lot of trouble by—er—disposing of you at once, as some of my associates suggested at the time. You would never have known what hit you, and there wouldn't have been all this waste of time and talk—though if it amuses you, I'm satisfied."

"M-m-m, I suppose I ought to be thankful to you for that," said Val. "I guess it wasn't very convenient for you to put me out of the way at the time, or you would have done it."

"Well, never mind that," put in Teck. "We're wasting a lot of time and—"

"At present," said Val, "time is the very thing I have nothing else but."

"—a lot of time, and there are many things I have to do before I leave this evening," went on Teck placidly.

"Leave this evening! Where are you going?" asked Val curiously.

The other looked at him. "Of course, strictly speaking, it is scarcely any of your business," he said. "My movements do not concern you in any way—but considering the fact that by this evening you will be definitely removed from this matter one way or another, I don't mind telling you that I am going to join Miss Pomeroy."

"Join Miss Pomeroy?" queried Val. "Why, isn't Miss Pomeroy in the city at present?"

"That's as may be," said Teck. "At any rate, I'm going to join Miss Pomeroy,

who, I may say, is awaiting me impatiently. I don't suppose it will interest you to know that we intend to marry this week—perhaps to-morrow, if possible—"

"Iggy, why try those clumsy lies on me?" protested Val. "It happens that I saw Miss Pomeroy last night, as undoubtedly you are aware, and she said nothing that would lead me to believe—"

"There's nothing surprising about that, my good man," said Teck patiently. "You see, she didn't know it herself at the time. In fact, she doesn't know it yet; but it's going to happen all the same."

"Marry you!" ejaculated Val, looking at him interestedly.

"Yes, me!" said Teck heatedly, his greenish eyes showing the first trace of anger they had shown during the conversation. "Why not?"

"Well, if you don't know why, Iggy, I guess there's no use arguing with you. All I have to say is that you'll marry Miss Pomeroy about the same time the Kaiser takes Chicago—or perhaps a trifle later than that."

"That remains to be seen," retorted Teck angrily. "Not that you'll be here to see it, either."

"There's one thing that puzzles me, Iggy," said Val. "It's about those books. What is there about them that makes it so important for you to get possession—"

"That's none of your business," snapped Teck, ugly and out of temper suddenly. "What I want to know is whether you will do as I ask. Promise me that you will—"

"I will not," said Val. "Get that idea out of your head. Under no circumstances will I make any such promises."

"Do you understand that I actually mean to do what I said—that I will—"

"I suppose so," said Val. "I think you are capable of anything, even that. Why are you so anxious to get rid of me, though? So anxious that you'll even commit murder—"

"Why, you're in my way, that's all. Even you ought to be able to see that, it's so plain. But I'm not going to argue with you any more. I have a great deal to attend to, and I'd better start on it. I'll

be back about noon—you'd better think things over pretty carefully until then, and give me the answer I want."

"If I'm here by then," put in Val.

"You'll be here. Oh, Rat!" he called. A giant of a man showed himself at the door and glared malevolently at Val.

"All right," directed Teck. The guard withdrew. "I just wanted you to know that there is somebody here looking out for you, while O'Hara sleeps. He has orders to prevent your escape at any cost. So don't try anything queer. Take my advice. He's short tempered, and an occasional bumping off means nothing in his young life. In fact, between him and O'Hara, I imagine they'd be rather glad of a chance to do you in, to pay you for that rumpus last night. Take it easy while I'm gone, and think it over pretty carefully."

CHAPTER XIX.

"UNTIL EVENING!"

THERE was little else Val could do besides "think it over pretty carefully" while Ignace Teck was gone. He could see all of the room from the couch on which he lay, and he inspected it carefully. It was an ordinary bedroom. At one end of the room, at a blank wall, was a walnut bed. On the other blank wall, opposite the only window, was the couch. At the south end was the door leading into the living room, where he could hear the guard addressed as Rat stirring occasionally. Near that end of the room was a small table.

There was no entrance but the door, and Rat was outside that. The window was just an ordinary window, with no fire-escape outside. It provided no mode of ready entrance or egress that Val could see. The window was closed its full length, though not locked, as Val could see from where he lay. There was no reason for locking it, evidently.

Next, Val gave his attention to the cord that bound him. He found little here that was of any comfort to him. He was bound tightly, and it took very little time for him to discover that he would not be able to

undo his bonds. The cords were on for good. He was helpless on the couch, with his hands bound behind his back and his feet closely tied. There was no hope there.

As time dragged on he grew thirstier and thirstier. His tongue and throat began to feel furry, and though he would have enjoyed breakfast, yet he would have appreciated a drink still more. Perhaps the guard in the next room—

"Hey, Rat!" he called.

The big form of the tough bulked in the doorway.

"Whatcher want, hey?" he glowered at Val.

"I'm awfully thirsty. Would you be good enough to get me a glass of water?" Perhaps the guard had not been told that he was to receive no sustenance of any sort.

"Better make it champagne, young feller," suggested Rat with heavy sarcasm. "You got just as much chanst of gettin' dat—see?"

He spread his right hand flat, indicating that the interview in so far as he was concerned, was finished.

"It might be worth your while, Rat," insinuated Val. "I'm not mentioning any names, but if anybody around here gives me a helping hand so that I can get out, why, that man won't have to do any work for the rest of the year." He looked at Rat significantly.

It did not work. The other shook his head vigorously.

"I never do any work anyway," he growled. "An' don't run away wit' no idea that anybody around here'll give you a lift. I'd like to bump you off, myself, after that there bash on th' dome you gimme last night. If I had my say, I'd knock yer fer a row o' red, white an' blue barber poles. Git me?"

Val nodded.

"I think I perceive what you're trying to tell me, rat face," said Val. "You mean that you won't give me a drink of water, don't you?"

"Dead right, kid," exclaimed the guard. "An' don't try that bribe stuff on me or any one around here agin. I might git

sulted an' pop yer one on th' bean—see?"

"Is it possible?" retorted Val.

"Don't git sarcastical, young feller," said Rat. "You'll soon find out if it's possible to insult me, if yer keep it up. I'm goin' out now, an' I don't want to be bothered. If I have to come in agin to yer, I'll put yer where ya kin hear the boidies sing."

With dignity he withdrew.

Val had to smile, in spite of his disappointment. That little sally of his last night had really done him a great deal of harm, he reflected. It had earned him the enmity of his guards, who, under ordinary circumstances, might have been amenable to a bribe.

As for Teck, he was not afraid of him, nor of his threats, for the simple reason that he did not think that even he would dare to carry them into execution. It is one thing to threaten to kill a man, and it is still another to proceed to carry out said threat in cold blood. Not that he did not think Teck capable of murder—far from that. But he did think that the project was too dangerous, even for Teck. For that reason he resolved to stick it out. Teck would bring pressure to bear—he was sure of that—but he was also sure that Teck would stop at murder.

The minutes dragged into hours as Val revolved the situation in his mind. It was about noon when Teck returned. He was not in good humor—Val could see that.

Val improved the shining moment.

"How about a drink, Iggy?" he asked innocuously.

"Have you decided to promise what I asked of you?" inquired Teck in his turn.

Val shook his head.

"Then don't worry about a drink, because you'll need one still worse where you are going from here," Teck promised him blackly.

"The latest authorities agree that there is no hell, except as one makes it for one's self on this earth," said Val. "I am a little surprised to see that you still believe in that obsolete place. It was a fiction invented for those—"

"Well, unless you do what I ask, you're going to find out pretty soon about hell,"

answered Teck. "I'm not inclined to stand any more nonsense from you."

He sat down at the table and regarded his prisoner bleakly.

"Got a smoke?" asked Val.

The other nodded. "But not for you, my friend," he said. He pressed his wrist to his vest pocket and a thin silver cigarette case leaped out. He opened it dexterously by pushing the catch, holding the case between his two wrists as he did so. It was one of the kind of cases that hold the cigarettes upright in the middle. All he had to do now was to bend his head and grasp one of the white paper rolls between his lips. Next he pressed the opposite vest pocket, and a thin lighter leaped out.

The cap opened as Teck pressed the button on the side, shooting a thin blade of flame toward him. He lighted his cigarette and closed the lighter. For a moment he said nothing, inhaling the smoke luxuriously.

"Very clever," commented Val.

"You learn to do things for yourself after a while," remarked Teck. "Now, about this promise—"

"How do you know that I'll keep my promise, anyway?"

"Oh, you will. I know your kind," Teck assured him.

"I know, Iggy, but a promise obtained under duress is not valid, anyway," Val protested.

"I'll take my chance on that," said Teck. He knew he was safe in that regard.

"I want a definite answer from you, Morley," announced Teck. "I'm leaving town this evening, and before I go you will have promised what I asked you, or you will no longer be in a position to promise anything. And don't console yourself with the idea that I'm bluffing—because if you call my bluff you won't be here to find out whether you were right or wrong. You know what I'm referring to," he said meaningly.

"Don't you know it's bad form to end a sentence with a preposition, Iggy? Where were you brought up, anyway?" Val inquired lightly.

"Never mind my grammar," growled Teck. "I'd sooner make grammatical mis-

takes and be alive than be perfect—and dead.”

“What pleasant ideas you have!” remarked Val.

“I’m going out and I won’t return until this evening. I’ll look in then just to see whether you are ready to come across—and if you’re not, why, I’ll continue on my

way—after handing you over to the tender mercies of Rat and O’Hara. And they’re not squeamish, either, I can assure you of that. And another thing—”

“Good-by, Iggy,” Val interrupted him, wriggling so that he was turned to the wall.

The other regarded him evilly for a moment, turned on his heel, and went out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



KERRY

I WENT back to Kerry—oh, after many years—
 Weary of the New World, longin’ for the Old;
 An’ I saw the crooked streets, I saw them through tears,
 An’ the little huddled houses against the sunset’s gold.
 Oh, Kerry town was a merry town when I was young;
 I minded me of all the lads an’ all the girls I knew.
 I minded me of all the songs that in my youth was sung,
 An’ how above the chimney-pots the sky seemed always blue.
*Kerry town, Kerry town, where me youth was spent;
 Kerry town, the very town fer old age an’ content.*

I looked in many a doorway fer faces I had known;
 I peeped in many a window, a-leanin’ on me stick.
 I well remembered every house an’ every cobblestone,
 An’ where, upon the mantel shelf, the tired clock would tick.
 Oh, Kerry town was a fairy town when I was a lad;
 But now—how lonesome was the streets when I came back!
 I thought the boys would welcome me, smile an’ be glad;
 I’m growin’ old an’ feeble, an’ it’s common sense I lack.
*Kerry town, Kerry town, changed is every face;
 Comin’ back to Kerry town I find another place.*

The old friends are scattered like leaves in the fall;
 Some is dead, like Dan O’Shey, dead these many years.
 How could I hope to find ’em, find ’em one an’ all?—
 (I’m growin’ old an’ foolish, an’ easy come the tears!)
 Oh, Kerry town, the merry town, is a sad old town to me,
 With Denis gone to hunt fer gold five thousand miles away,
 An’ every long-lost playmate far beyond the sea,
 An’ every girl I ever kissed now old an’ bent an’ gray.
*Kerry town, Kerry town, why did I come back,
 Thinkin’ I would find unchanged every little shack?*

I’ve changed meself. Yes, that I know—know it full well.
 The New World is on me though me old hair is white.
 An’ lads who were so simple might find it hard to tell
 That I was Michael Phelan, born in Kerry candlelight.
 Oh, Kerry town’s where I was born. I wanted it the same,
 But nothin’ ever quite remains the way it used to be.
 I’d rather the old friends was gone, fer if I spoke me name
 An’ they looked blank, I think I’d weep that they’d fergotten me.
*Kerry town, Kerry town, I’ll kiss yer stones an’ go,
 Fer, after all, the New World is the only place I know.*

Charles Hanson Towne.



Rose Fever

By **GERALD HUNTOON**

THE admiral sneezed—and then snorted, twice, heavily. The admiral was in the habit of sneezing, being an enthusiastic adherent to all creeds for the cure of rose fever. However, this was an exceptional sneeze—a sneeze which any rose feverite, even with a dose of “flu,” might envy. It nearly cost the admiral the life of his favorite orderly. That worthy, one Private Harold Simpkins, U. S. M. C., was seated in the admiral’s pantry, performing that sacred rite of a leatherneck’s life, the spearing of the elusive bean, when the terrific explosion in the cabin almost caused the severing of his windpipe.

“I ain’t bullin’ you none whatever,” he later confided to his messmate, one Cog-gins. “This thing has got to stop! It’s gettin’ so’s a man can’t set down to a peaceful meal without his nibs lettin’ go with both barrels of that five-inch quick firer of his, and scarin’ about five more beans down

my main hatch than she’s built to stand. Besides, I nearly lost one perfectly good sarcophagus this mornin’ what with me knife bein’ pushed down me throat by the explosion. One more like that and I’m goin’ over the hill, and keep goin’ till I find folks that thinks a holystone has somethin’ to do with Blarney Castle.

“I’m slippin’ you one thing straight—I’ve served under some funny ones—under old Robinson, for instance, which would get drunk and then hiccup somethin’ frightful for the rest of the night—and “Dippy” Johnson, what used to bring as many monkeys as possible back from every gin party he went on in the Asiatic Station, and then chase ’em all over the wardroom country with books—and any number of other nuts. But, bo, this havin’ to stand in a passageway all day, and every day, and listen to that human machine gun tryin’ to sneeze, snort, cough, and cuss, all at the same time

—well, I'm sayin' that there'll have to be another deserter's notice struck off the printin' press if it keeps up.

"Sneezin' and such like has always got my goat, 'cause it always reminds me of the Santa Blanca revolution, and the lot of fun and the pile of kale what a pair of us missed.

"You see, the Spiggoties of Santa Blanca was, at that time, about 1908 or so, in the midst of a little eruption which interfered somethin' scandalous with the benevolent activities of two or three foreign oil companies. Of course they howled holy murder to the newspapers and everybody else that would listen to their weeps, and as a result about all the footloose young bloods in the States come runnin' down to do the Richard Harding Davis stuff. Likewise, two or three old cruisers is sent down to snoop around, and pick up the usual Spanish Jews what would claim to have been born in Chicago, while a lot of blood-thirsty soldiers would claim to be their first cousins.

"I was servin', at the time, as a bugler on the old Portland, and one day while we is lyin' in off California City, I sees the old man come up to mornin' quarters with his spectacles on—so I just decided right there to ask for a forty-eight-hour leave to go down and tell a couple of janes in Honest John's place good-bye. Old 'Pickles' Davis didn't never wear his specs except when he was goin' to read somethin' interestin', like the time he read off Slim Johnston's general court which gave him twenty years in Leavenworth. Well, I was right. The orders said to get under way for Santa Blanca, as soon as we was ready, if not considerably sooner.

"Two days later, with three months' sea stores on board, we was off for the blinkin' fray. We meandered down the coast at about all the old hooker could make, and, what I mean, it wasn't no afternoon yachtin' party for nobody. Why, they had me blowin' that poor old horn of mine, callin' the crew to battle drills, until I thought I had housemaid's knee in me cheeks. Finally, one afternoon, we raised them big, misty purple mountains of Santa Blanca, ahead, and in a couple of hours dropped anchor

in one of these sapphire blue, half moon bays, fringed all around with a milky strip of sand. It was a great place, only that sapphire blue was full of the most familiar actin' sharks, and the sand fleas let up a cheer when they sighted us. Aside from that and some mosquitoes which didn't monkey with no small fry like gobs—they gnawed the paint off the masts—as I say, aside from these few little things, and a heat that made the sweat sizzle on your back, it was a nice place.

"You'd a thought that we'd soon see all there was to see in that joint, but we only stayed three weeks in that blasted harbor, and the only time we had to see it was lookin' over your shoulder, durin' drills. We stayed, and stayed, and then stayed some more, catchin' glimpses now and then of dogs and buzzards and war correspondents scamperin' busily around the beach, while every time a radio message came in we sat around and watered at the mouth until the cooks and the commissary steward got real flattered. And we'd probably still be sittin' out there in that bay, if the inquirin' offspring of some State's Congressman hadn't got hisself bumped off while assistin' in the revolution. And then, you ought to have seen the fur fly!

"In about ten minutes after the news got to Washington, there was about three hundred of us started for Cordovas, the Spiggoty capital. It was a furious campaign. We struggled onto some flat cars after dealin' heavy reprisals on the savage frijoles, and other native beasts, and all the way up that jerk-water railroad we delivered a witherin' fire against the sand fleas and native gin.

"It was terrible—and we finally got to fire off our shiny new rifles in scarin' off the city police when we alights at Cordovas. Our commanding officer, a captain in the Marines, camps on the edge of town and pikes off to the palace by hisself to find out what was what—our orders bein' pretty vague, and us not knowin' for certain whose side we was on. I tried to shift my job to bein' his orderly, but he chased me back, so me and Danny Powers, my buddie, sits down on a little bank and watched for him to turn up again.

"Which he did, in about an hour or so, with a face as long as a mid-watch, announcin' in loud, raucous tones that he ain't in sympathy at all with no yellow-backed republics what called off their fights just when the real fun is about to begin. Well, Danny braved the storm and asked him what had broke up the party, and after about five minutes more fireworks the captain come down and tells us—it seems, as far as we could tell, that the Marshal Foch of the rebel crowd has got caught takin' a bath by the government troops, and his brother, the other white hope of their party, was captured at the same time. Furthermore, all his army, on gettin' their general's obituary notice, has spit out the bullets they was chawin' at the moment, and faded away into the hills.

"We went back to the others, what was sittin' around, fightin' the flies, and that sure was one blue-lookin' gang when the news sifted through. Why, even old Tubby Mason, which never fought nothin' more ferocious than a centipede, was so mad and hot he was crosseyed. Still, there was nothin' you could do about it, so we is marched up to a little park near the *presidente's* palace to camp and wait for things to clear up and for orders to go back to the ship.

"Of course there is a big parade staged for the returnin' heroes which started to drift in by companies late that afternoon. The captain kept us in camp while they staged this celebration to save any trouble bein' started with the wrong party, but the joyful townspeople, whose money gave the celebration, streamed past all afternoon—and the first thing I noticed was that they didn't seem to be so darn enthusiastic except when some guard from the palace was real near. Well, Danny and me got to watchin' real close, and this confetti throwin' didn't deceive us at all, cause the occasional looks that was thrown over our heads at the palace didn't seem to promise any victories for the old *presidente* in the local popularity contest.

"Danny tried out two or three of these birds, bein' able to speak their lingo pretty well, and after a while he got one that spilled the dope. It seems that these young

brothers what had bossed the rebels must have been pretty good eggs. The one that had been bumped off while exercisin' his foreign education, had been in the cabinet and had a fine record of not gettin' away with no more graft than was absolutely necessary to his self-respect, and of helpin' out the poorer bunch considerably. The trouble with these young birds was that they didn't have no Lee Christmases to win their battles, and not enough stuff to offer the oil people to get them on their side. Consequently one of 'em is dead and the other is goin' to perform against a big wall in the park, assisted by a whole squad of the *presidente's* army and a coffin.

"It always makes me feel real blue to be in a South American country at the end of one of their affairs—there's so many real nice young fellows what has to back up against a wall—and let me say right here that they do it darn well—a whole lot better than these bloodhounds would what egg on the scrappers in these inter-fleet fights. Me feelin' that way, and Danny always bein' sore when we're in the tropics, on account of prickly heat and sunburn favorin' him most particular with their attentions, we feel the need of a little bright lights, and when the captain at last let us go ashore, we beats it as soon as we can shift into clean rig.

"This town of Cordovas was a lot like Washington, D. C.; a fine white sandstone building with lots of nice green rooster-tails stickin' up around it—and, next door, a fine board shack, with a few dogs and bow-legged yellow kids playin' behind a picket fence what has the blind staggers real bad. In the center of town, about four blocks from the palace, there is the usual Grand Plaza, with all the saloons arranged around it real neat and cozy, and room for all the low-necked hacks to park while the blood and money watches the celebration.

"By the time we arrived, the plaza was crowded with army drunks, and the joyful citizens. These last was wanderin' about very doleful and scatterin' a few handfuls of confetti, meanwhile yellin' 'Viva' like it was the name of their dead wife. It was a glorious scene—me and Danny takes one

look at it all and then sets out, slow and unhurried, to get good and drunk. Danny said he was goin' to get bad enough so's he could imagine he was back in Shorty's place—you know; down on Canal Street—but he was pretty downhearted—he didn't have no come back when I told him he flattered his imagination.

"However, we proceeded in due form, and along about eleven we almost had arrived at the proper stage. At that time our principal indoor sport was kickin' various and sundry of the army and bettin' whether they'd fight or run. As we tired of that, the idea hit us of explorin' the rest of the town, so out we starts, and dives down a dark little alley, in search of anything from a cock fight to a funeral.

"I remember we went along this muddy little lane for about two hundred yards, singin' 'The Armored Cruiser Squadron,' and dodgin' the flower pots that dropped every now and then from the housetops, when, in roundin' a narrow corner we sights a dozen or so hard-lookin' eggs clustered around a carriage—and the carriage had a woman in it.

"Now Danny always did have the rescuin' of females in distress on the brain, anyway, so he yells to me and we deploy for an advance, me bein' prudent by stoppin' to collect a few pavin' stones on the way. We'd have arrived all shipshape and in proper order, too, if these aforesaid stones hadn't been so ee-lusive. I had to chase one for nearly a minute and fell down three times before I finally cornered it. By the time I had three of them and proceeded with the advance of the left wing, Danny was in the middle of the enemy. In just about one second flat he got thrown on the ground, kicked into a jelly, and one of the Spiggoties with a powerful bright knife was beginnin' to show curiosity about old Danny's insides. I reckon that a sharp little command from the lady in the carriage did about as much to stop that curiosity as my brick, but we couldn't tell for a while, the brick havin' hit him in the ear.

"They were on the point of startin' to do me up, too, but the lady stops 'em again, and they backs away, givin' me some abso-

lutely filthy looks while I goes up and explains to the young woman what we had attacked the crowd for. She evidently understood English all right, 'cause she leaned back, relieved, and an old whiskered gent beside her grins, and starts talkin' real fast to her in their lingo.

"Old Danny sat up about that time and gave me the reproachful eye and a few remarks about drunken old fools, so I was standin' there feelin' pretty foolish, when the old geezer that had been talkin' to the lady, comes up with a bow and a smile that would have sweetened vinegar.

"'Perhaps the American soldiers would like a little excitement?' he says. 'They can do a great service to this lady if they wish. She is ver' great lady, and will pay well for your services.'

"Well, Danny perks up and wants to know right away what there is to be done.

"'It is a rescue of the hero of our country, this lady's brother, and the people of our nation will hail you as their saviors forever, if we succeed! It will be dangerous, but then, the men of your so great country have a love for the adventure. I know them.'

"He knew us all right! Danny fell for that stuff from start to finish, and, even while I was wonderin' what the captain would use to take our skins off with if he found out we'd been meddlin', I was on the edge of givin' in, myself, when that girl put her oar in.

"She leaned out of the carriage, droppin' the armadillo what had been wrapped around her face, and she certainly was the great little pleader.

"'Ple-e-ze!' she murmurs, with tears in her eyes. 'We have the need of the American officers so much! My brother, he will be shot in the morning by that peeg in the palace if you do not liberate him.'

"And she smiles a mournful little smile and holds out her hand.

"Me? Why, brother, I beats Danny to that hand, even against a three-foot handicap—and about scared the old whiskered gent silly for fear I'd hurt her. Of course, all that decided me was the wonderful prospect of this young bird gettin' loose and startin' the fightin' all over again. Danny

just plain went nuts over the girl, but me, I was thinkin' that if we could pull off somethin' real good, our fortunes is made, and the Marine Corps would have to get somebody else to do their fightin'.

"All the other Spiggoties, that has been givin' the proceedin's the bleary eye, comes up at this point, and of all the wild bows and careless wavin' of hats, and of all the polite hissin' of 'S-seny-yor' that you ever heard! They'd have been at it yet, if Danny hadn't cut 'em short with a few questions about gettin' around the several hundred *with* rifles that was tryin' very earnest like to keep this here, young Martinez, right where he was.

"At that the whole darned bunch started tellin' exactly which guards they was goin' to cut the heart out of; and how they was goin' to blow up the palace, only there didn't seem to be no powder hangin' around; and how they is goin' to cart friend brother to the seacoast on a captured railroad engine, only that engine is parked right next to the government troops' camp; and so forth. They jabbered for five minutes, while Danny refereed and I kept time, till the old whiskers, which is named Alvarados, shuts 'em up sharp, and lets us in on the few plans that has been made so far.

"The start of their action was goin' to be the sendin' of this young sister of Martinez up to the palace, to pretend to plead for her brother's life. She is to take an old servant along with her which will have two very elegant bombs under her cloak. After bein' turned down by the *presidente*, as they expects to be, the stunt is for them to walk real slow back to their carriage. As soon as they are in it, and the horses has started up, the bombs is goin' to be heaved with as much gusto as possible at the door of the palace.

In the meantime the rest of these hombres is goin' to hide near a side entrance. As the bombs explode and bring the guards from all over the whole place, they're to rush the sentry at the side door, beat it down to the cells, and trustin' to the surprise and the fact that they're to have on the green uniform of the government, they hopes to get Martinez out. From that

point on they've been pretty hazy, 'cause there's no safe way to get out of the city, all the roads and paths bein' heavily guarded.

"But now the girl has suggested that, as they fight their way out of the palace, they're to come past our camp, and Martinez is to slip into the camp to hide in our tent for as long as possible, until the search eases down enough for him to slip away. It sounded pretty wild and useless, but at least he wouldn't be standin' up against that firin' squad, and they hopes that their army would reorganize when the news spread that their leader was free.

"Danny and me, about then, walked off a little way to hold a council of war. It all looked pretty good to me, and I said so. Even if we got caught they can't do no more than courtmartial us for assistin' in a riot while we is drunk, and the chances is good that we'll get away with it and get a big job or a lot of kale. We didn't take long to agree, so we went back to tell 'em that we'd act as per schedule, and to arrange a few details such as the exact meetin' place.

"When we announced that it was all right with us, I thinks for a minute that some way we'd started another fight, but it was only that they wanted to embrace us. I got two kisses in on the young lady, while Danny gives me the green eye, and we then started back for camp. Just as we set out, the girl reached back in the carriage and threw a big bunch of beautiful red roses to Danny, blowin' kisses to us with her finger tips. Them roses! Oh, hell!

"All pepped up over this little affair, we sang all the way back, stumblin' through every mud pond in town before we found camp, and nearly gettin' locked up for disturbin' the peace.

"Arrived at last, and shifted into dungarees, we eased out the back entrance of our tent and ambled down to a big clump of bushes at the edge of the street. We sat there for nearly an hour without anythin' stirrin'. Mostly we just sat and smoked, thinkin' what we would do if everything went through all o. k.; but now and then we'd perk up when a carriage would slide up to the palace steps.

"From where we was hid, we had a good view of both entrances, and along about one o'clock we seen that there is a few more green uniforms passin' and repassin' the side gate. They showed up dim and sneaky through the night mist that had settled down, and I sort of shivered when I thought of what those birds was goin' up at, if the surprise didn't work. I admit I was feelin' pretty blue about the outcome of the thing, there in the dark under that hush, when all of a sudden she went!

"Man, dear! Them was some bombs! There was a roar you could hear for miles, that shook the ground and made our ears ring for an hour, and then a dead, dead silence. You could hear the girl's horses which had been knocked off their feet, scramble on the hard pavement and then find their legs. The carriage seemed to hesitate for a second, and then reeled off down one of them dark little alleys, goin' like the wind. A second later, hell broke loose. Guards come pourin' out of the front gates like ants, yellin' like demons, and firin' at everybody they laid eyes on. It certainly worked rich! The more hullabaloo they made, the less you could notice the beautiful little mixed fight that flurried up at the side entrance one second and died out the next.

"All that we could see, even, was the flash of bayonets for a moment in the dim flare of the entrance light, and then a little knot of men faded through the doorway like ghosts, leavin' a few huddled up things behind them. The main guard was still lookin' for them women.

"I swear that little bunch of rebels was the quickest workers I ever laid my money on. You can imagine the way we strained for 'em to hurry, but with all our anxiousness, it didn't appear to take any time until they was out again, the front ones running' along in a group with the ones behind fightin' off a few dazed guards.

"But there was where things changed. The main bunch caught sight of the fightin' this time, and after a little hesitation in firin' at their own uniform, they got hep to the rescue. They cut loose, all at once, and in no time the bullets was rainin' in from all directions. A machine gun limbered up

and added to the uproar, and the whole kit and boodle of 'em started after the rebels. Of course, Martinez's hunch would have been eaten up in one minute, daylight saving time, if they had stopped to fight—but they didn't. Down the road they come, steppin' along pretty brisk, past our bushes, and then off to the left, like they was shy of the bugles that is soundin' in our camp. All except one, a slim, wavy haired fellow—he didn't sheer off, but made a flyin' tackle on the first clump of hushes. Before he hardly hit, we each had one of his arms and is snakin' him along real hurried for the tent, and it's a good thing we made speed, for the first three Greenies missed us by the thickness of one of my hairs—and I'm pretty near bald.

"Quiet was the word, and we sneaked along in the shadows to the tent without no words. In he went, while we beat it for formation, which was goin' on out in front. The Spiggoty captain of the guard was just comin' into the park, and our names was hein' called for the last time as we slid into ranks on our heels and answered, 'Here.'

"The captain put the companies at ease, and went over to the searchers to see what all the outburst was about. He found out soon enough! There is a stream of mixed Spanish and English come from that guard captain's trap that was thick enough to use as concrete. They'd recognized the young fellow as he left his screen of rescuers, and these birds hoped there wasn't goin' to be no trouble; but anyway, they was goin' to search all around the noble *Americanos*' camp for the miscreant.

"Well, can you guess how we felt when we hears that? Well, then, you clever thing, see if you can guess how we felt when our chief says 'All right,' and asks if they need any help.

"Oh, hoy! It was some feelin'—but the captain quieted our nerves a little by announcin' that no dagoes was goin' in our tents. We is given orders to fall out and stand by our tent flies, and to assist the Spigs wherever possible. Me and Danny moved off as quick as our wabby knees would carry us, and reached our tent before anybody else.

"'Boy, take a round turn and a half hitch in that tongue of yours and forget how to breathe for the next ten minutes!' says I through the tent flaps. 'They're tryin' to locate you in the camp!'

"I didn't get no reply except a choky sort of gasp, and then we had to straighten up, for here comes the whole bunch of the inspectin' party. They moves along slow, peerin' at everything, usin' flashlights. They draws abreast, we salute, and they pass on. I was just drawin' my first breath in ten minutes, as I come down from the salute, when out of that tent comes the most ungodly snort you ever heard—why, even his nibs in there couldn't touch it. And the snort is followed by a regular machine gun full of sneezes.

"The stuff was off! They all come runnin' back, I registers astonishment to cover up Danny, who whispers to the kid to run; but we was too late. As the young one ducks out the back way, a big clodhopper of a Greenie embraces him lovin', and they goes to the mat in a flyin' clinch, with a dozen more dancin' around tryin' to get into it. It was all over in a minute, the Martinez bein' led off to jail and us in a terrible sweat while tryin' to get over the 'Innocent Tessie' act with the captain. I think he had his suspicions, but if he did he kept 'em to himself. He let us go to bed, and went away chucklin'. Chucklin'! As if that was anything funny!

"We eased back home pretty silent, and neither was there any animated conversation while we're undressin'. The lights was all out in the tent, and as Danny sat down on his bunk in the dark, he ran into a thorn. He of course said 'ouch' in a half hearted way, sat still for a minute, and then lets out a lovely string of words that I, for one, had never heard before or since.

"Then the idiot grabbed at somethin' beneath him, pulled it out and sniffed at it—it was that big bunch of roses that the girl had give him.

"'Rose fever, by gum! That's what did it,' he yells. 'I've had a touch, myself, and I know now what made that poor kid give hisself away!'

"And, so help me, Dan was right.

"The captain went up to the palace the first thing in the morning about young Martinez, because he thought it would quiet the people down if he wasn't killed. By usin' some kind of high handed flim-flam—he looked all het up when he came back—he got the young fellow's sentence commuted to exile for life. Consequently we saw him when they put him on the train to take him out.

"Danny caught his eye over the heads of the crowd, and yelled, 'Roses?' and Martinez just nods slow and mournful.

"Yessir, I'm comin'! Nossir, the menthol inhaler stuff is all gone, but I can get some over in town. Aye, aye, sir."

U U U U

THE MAIDS OF VANITY FAIR

THE maids of Vanity Fair, oh, ho!

'Tis a wearisome fate that flung them.

For they're taught to sit in a lifeless row,
And a man must come with his hair just so,
And a collar that's neither too high nor low,
And a family tree, and money to blow,
And then if he's *thoroughly* nice, you know,

He's given a place among them.

But few can be found, and they won't go round—

'Tis the look of the maid that shows it;

For the fun of the world is being a girl,
With a man near by that knows it.

Juliet Wilbor Tompkins.



Poker Faces

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

Author of "A Noise in Newboro," "Stay Home," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

UPSTAIRS AT LAST.

HENRY CURLEW, on his feet, caught at his chair and swayed a trifle.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that!" he protested.

"No, I know you wouldn't," Mr. Dixon smiled calmly and tolerantly. "But I think we will. Eh, Betty? You don't mind if I call you Betty?"

"No, I don't mind at all, but—"

"Say, you don't get any too much fun out of life, do you, kid?" the visitor asked, his whole attention centering again on Betty, in the same intense fashion.

"No!" said little Mrs. Whitmore, with her eyes on her husband.

"Well, here's where you're going to have some *real* fun, then! We'll start with one of the midnight shows, and then I'll get in

touch with a fellow I know here, and have him put us on to what we ought to see after that—all night places, I mean, dancing and so on—nothing rough, kid! I wouldn't let you in for anything like that—but interesting to watch. Then we might get down and see what's left of Chinatown and—"

Henry Curlew, having cleared his throat, raised his voice abruptly, rendering it much louder and more positive than it had been at any other time that night.

"I am sure," he declaimed, "that Miss Banford is very much too tired for that sort of thing, Dixon! Are you not, Miss Banford?"

Mrs. Whitmore, who had been steadily regarding her husband with a very small and wicked smile, turned suddenly to her husband's employer.

"Er—yes!" she agreed. "Very much too tired!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 18.

"What?" Dixon asked, his grin vanishing. "Did you say that because it's so, or because you think that's what he wants you to say?"

"She said it because it's so, Dixon," Henry said gently. "You see, Miss Banford has been pretty busy to-day, and—er—"

"Yes, I see," the visitor said angrily. "Sometimes I think I see too much. I—Say, I think it's downright rotten that a girl can't call her soul her own!"

"But, my dear boy, I assure you that Miss Banford's soul—"

"No, it's not," Mr. Dixon corrected, without even permitting him to finish. "She's just like every other girl in the same position—afraid of her employer because she's afraid of losing her job. It's a pretty dog-goned bad state of affairs when a girl has to feel like that and has to work for a living!"

"Um—ah—economic conditions—" Henry essayed blandly.

"Bah!" snapped the gentleman from afar, his warm eyes roving over Betty's dainty person. "You live here, kid, don't you?"

"She does now, of course," said Henry.

"Treat you right?"

"Why—splendidly!" Betty dimpled.

"You'd have to say that, with him around," Dixon reflected. "Got a nice room?"

"One of the best in the house," Henry supplied, and his courtesy seemed just a trifle strained. "Would you like to inspect it?"

"Mr. Dixon's eye settled upon him.

"I know. You think it's funny of me, going on like this. But I'm that way," he said simply. "That is, I've always been helping people that weren't so big and weren't able to put up so much of a fight. I don't know whether you get just what I mean, but I'm not bragging, Curlew. I'm interested in—people that have to work for a living, like Miss Banford, and a good many times I've been able to make things a little pleasanter for 'em. Yes, I'd like to look at her room!" he finished placidly.

"You—you—shall!" Henry said dog-

gedly. "Er—Gorely! Where's Gorely? Oh—Gorely, which room did you give Miss Banford?"

"Well, Miss Mabel's old room, sir," said the butler. "You suggested—"

"Mabel's room!" Henry muttered, and shuffled toward the corridor. "This way, Dixon. The rest of you may as well come, too."

The remarkable Mr. Dixon, smiling rather complacently to himself, sauntered after, a hand on Betty's arm. James moved dizzily at the rear. So they ascended the great flight to the wide upper hallway—and again, although in no such pronounced fashion, the size of the place impressed young Mr. Whitmore. There were doors up here and more doors; the corridor itself would have made a huge room; and there was a door over there to which Henry Curlew shuffled and which he opened.

"This one, Dixon!" he said. "Will you—will you approve it?"

Internally James chuckled suddenly.

Henry, exasperated beyond bearing, was himself at the breaking point. Two minutes, and Henry should explode, all considerations notwithstanding: and when he did *that*, truth would begin to flash about that upper corridor quite blindingly, and then—

"Um—it's all right!" Mr. Dixon muttered, surveying possibly three thousand dollars worth of beautiful, chaste furniture. "Pretty nice in its way. *You* like it, Betty?"

"Oh, I think it's wonderful!"

"You probably do, at that, poor kid!" Mr. Dixon muttered, with a small and bitter smile. "Well, if it pleases you, nothing more's necessary. You're not too tired for a little two-handed game of—"

"Miss Banford is much too tired for anything else to-night," Henry broke in emphatically, although his exasperation had died down disappointingly. "You see, Dixon, you're so full of vitality that you don't realize how much a mere slip of a girl needs proper rest."

"Um—that may be, too," the visitor conceded. "I—well, say, you look pretty, well fagged out yourself!"

"Oh, I'll trot off to bed presently," Henry agreed with his weary smile. "And

you must do just that, too, Dixon! You must be actually exhausted, after riding several thousand miles and—"

"Oh, no!" the visitor put in cheerily.

"And in any case, you need a good night's sleep now, because to-morrow will be a very, very busy day for all of us!" the host went on relentlessly, and dragged his way over and opened Dixon's door, which was at the front of the house, and displayed to James's unappreciative eye a sitting room elaborate enough to have served for royalty. "Pretty evident that I shall have to take charge of you, for your own good!" Henry concluded, and pointed inward. "Off to bed with you, Dixon! Hanged if I'll spend to-morrow talking to a man who's trying to yawn his head off!"

Mr. Dixon, eyes fixed upon Betty, sighed heavily, and at last dragged the eyes away.

"Well—" said he.

"Come along! I'll see that you're comfortable! Good night, Miss Banford. If there's anything you need, ring, and one of the maids will come to you at once. Right this way, Dixon!"

"Oh, you don't have to tuck me in; I can look after myself," the other said, with a rather sulky smile, as he moved slowly into his little suite. "Used to doing that, you know. I— Good night, Betty!" he called, the smile growing imbecile.

"Good night," said little Mrs. Whitmore, and glanced at him with feeling so nicely judged as to set James's teeth to grinding.

"And we'll—we'll just toddle along, too, James!" Henry said, and pure thankfulness gushed from his stifled yawn. "Pretty late for you to be going home, when we have to make an early start to-morrow. You'd better bunk here."

"Very well."

"Mrs. Whitmore won't mind," the host chattered on. "You can phone her and explain—"

"Can't I do that for you, Mr. Whitmore?" Betty asked suddenly, and stepped from her room again. "Yes, let me attend to that for you. What is the number, please?"

Dixon also stepped back to the corridor.

"Oh, say—I think a man's voice will serve a good deal better for a message of that kind at this hour," he said. "I can imagine what she may say, and I'm not going to have you exposed to—"

"It's quite all right, I assure you!" little Mrs. Whitmore said briskly. "A secretary attends to messages of that kind at any hour. What is the number, Mr. Whitmore?"

"Honey, you're just a little girl, and I guess you don't understand!" Mr. Dixon said, very firmly, as he seized her shoulders and pointed her back to her room. "You let him do his own telephoning and you just run off to bed. Good night!"

The door closed on Miss Banford.

Long, fixedly, even raptly did Mr. Dixon stare at the beautifully paneled portal.

"Innocent!" he breathed. "Lord isn't she an innocent little thing!"

"She certainly is!" Henry agreed, and his voice was growing fainter. "Good night—Dixon!"

With a slow wrench Mr. Dixon's gaze left the door; an instant he looked at them unseeing.

"Innocent 'as—what? Oh—yes, sure!" he said. "Good night, fellows!"

He drifted into the suite. Blankly, ecstatically, he smiled over their heads, as one might smile into the gates of heaven. Then the latch clicked and Mr. Dixon vanished—and Henry Curlew leaned weakly against his head accountant.

"C-c-caged at last!" Henry breathed.

"Umum," agreed James.

"That meal ought to stun him in—in half an hour. Don't you think it ought to stun him inside of half an hour, Jimmy?" the master of the house inquired piteously.

"If there's any way to stun him."

"There is—there must be! We'll go downstairs a little while and then, when he's asleep, I'll—I'll—" The rest was lost in his yawn.

He was a sorry figure, this elderly gentleman tottering down the flight with most of his weight on James Whitmore's arm. He was downright distressing when James eased him into a big chair.

"James, in—in all my years of business," he faltered—"and I've tackled some

funny ones, too—I never saw anything quite like him."

"He's just himself, I suppose!" James said grimly.

"Naturally, but there's something about him—something—say! I think possibly you'd better stay up there until he's sound asleep."

"I think so, too!" James said quickly.

"And you'll really have to sleep here yourself, Jim. I—I'd be helpless if he broke loose again. I'm—all in!" Henry croaked. "You can telephone Mrs. Whitmore and make her understand?"

"Mrs. Whitmore will understand without any telephoning," her husband said briefly as he moved toward the door.

"That's—that's good! And—Jimmy! Take that room at the rear, across the hall from Miss Banford's. You'll find it ready, I think. The one with the unusually light streak in the left panel. That one, and—Whitmore, you won't go to sleep yourself till you're able to hear him snore?"

"I will not!" said young Mr. Whitmore as he hurried out.

For he was in genuine haste to be up there. He sped on tiptoe to the foot of the stairs and listened—and it seemed to James that a latch clicked and a hinge creaked; and a small, dreadful growl rattled in his throat and his hands worked, and he listened on, so intently that the very muscles of his neck crackled.

The sounds were not repeated. He waited for a matter of further seconds and then hurried lithely to the second floor, arriving with a catlike bound and all but crashing into Betty herself, who chanced to be standing in the center of the corridor.

Betty's eyes were large and luminous, although there was nothing about this latter quality to suggest the light of love. Betty's gentle little bosom also heaved very emotionally, and there was a knifelike swish to Betty's whisper as she said:

"Did—you—telephone—her?"

"Huh?" grunted James.

"Did you?"

"I did not!"

"Why not?"

"Well, if you don't know why I didn't telephone, who—" James began wildly.

"Oh, but I do! You feared I'd be listening! And you were right. And let me tell you this, James Whitmore, you've fooled me—yes! I don't know how; I can't think yet; but you'll never do it again, and I—I'll pay you, if—"

"Betty!" gasped James.

"Eh—huh?" issued from behind the Dixon door.

Also, there was a thudding sound, as if the giant had planted his ample feet on the floor just then; and James, with a violent start, gripped at his little wife; and from James's touch his little wife recoiled as if the hand had carried a deadly infection. Then, eyes flaming from James to the closed door and back again, little Mrs. Whitmore turned suddenly and shot soundlessly into her own room.

Lips moving senselessly, throat closing, temples throbbing, James waited. Nothing happened, even after a minute; Dixon's suite, entirely empty, could have been no more quiet. Young Mr. Whitmore, breathing heavily, walked down the corridor, found the light streak in the panel, entered a room softly illuminated by a single lamp in the corner, closed the door and leaned against it.

It was a beautiful place, all done in real Colonial mahogany of the sort which, normally, would have thrilled him; just now a single glance of inspection sufficed, and after it James seized the nearest chair, placed it beside the door and sat down, tense. For a while his duty, personal and business, would be on listening post!

And if ever Dixon came out of his door and approached Betty's door—if ever Dixon did that! Three utterly silent minutes, James panted through clenched teeth; then, rather mercifully, he felt the blood receding from his fevered head and knew the arrival of sensations akin to coherent thought.

So far as Dixon went, the great clown was doubtless on his way to bed long before this, if not actually between the sheets. Certainly there was no sound of movement from his direction—and James's ears were preternaturally keen just now. And as concerned Betty, there would be much, much explaining to do after the immediate madness was over with and Curlew had attained his end

—and Curlew 'd have to do something in the way of corroboration, by the way. And that meant that Curlew would have to learn the odd circumstances of James's relation to Betty, did it not? James shivered. Discharge, then—his job gone—his wife gone—his home shattered—all these things danced before him, gibbering, not mere possibilities, but very strong probabilities. And with Betty lost, the downward slide would be rapid! Mistily, James saw himself, tattered and broken, a drug fiend, perhaps, asleep on a park bench and—oh, what in blazes was the matter with him, anyway? Young Mr. Whitmore sat up with a snarl and a jerk.

Every minute little Betty, just across the hall, was growing more thoroughly convinced of James's perfidy. Let her brood upon it for hours and the outcome might be almost anything; and she shouldn't brood upon it for even one hour, therefore, because young Mr. Whitmore, rising, intended to take at least a small chance by going over to Betty's room and telling her the cold truth, promise to Curlew or no promise!

The corridor was perfectly still. James, door drawn gently after him, stepped out, stepped, in fact, to Betty's door and had just raised his hand to knock when his ear caught:

"Don't do it!"

"Eh?" said James, and whirled about to face Mr. Dixon, who wore soft slippers, but was otherwise as when they had last met.

"Y' know, Whitmore, I thought you had something like that in mind!" rumbled softly, ferociously from the big man. "You damned dirty—"

"Dixon!" James began, rather forcefully. "I—"

Dixon, however, looming over him, was shaking visibly.

"If this was my house you'd go through that end window, pane and all!" he stated. "It's not! It's Curlew's and—and I can imagine what a killing 'd mean to Curlew's family, in the way of scandal. So—so you get back there, Whitmore!" ordered the visitor, and pointed to James's door, still ajar. "Get back, quick, while I've still got hold of myself, or by the mighty—"

He choked. Young Mr. Whitmore, glanc-

ing up at him, did the very wisest thing by walking straight toward his own apartment; nor was this by any means cowardice, for he had sworn to keep Dixon pleased and interested, and while he seemed interested at the moment no stretch of the imagination could have fancied him pleased.

"And lemme tell you one more thing," he was saying just then. "You try that again, you stick your nose outside that door just once more, and—*get in there!*"

His trembling finger still pointed. James entered and closed the door, swallowing somewhat hysterically. James wheeled about and, an ear to the panel, listened—heard the soft pad of Dixon's feet make their way straight to the suite where they belonged—and then relaxed.

So the—the creature apparently was not yet asleep! Perhaps he meant to keep awake all night, by way of protecting Betty. Perhaps, even now, he was listening, just as James was listening over here. Hands gripped hard together, young Mr. Whitmore laughed a small, mad laugh, wherein lurked no smallest trace of mirth.

No—Dixon was moving around distantly. He kept on moving for several minutes, giving off an occasional thud in the process. Now he was still again for more minutes. So at last he was in bed and it might be James's privilege to essay another trip to the side of his troubled little wife? No, he wasn't in bed yet. He had taken to his thumping again. Maybe he meant to go on with that sort of thing all night, alternating a spell of thumping with a spell of repose. James glanced at his watch. It was past one o'clock now.

The long hand crawled on and on and on; it was nearing the half hour. James listened hard once more. A full twenty minutes there had been no sound at all from the Dixon direction. At an apparently safe guess, the visitor really had settled down.

So James arose and nerved himself for perhaps the most utterly soundless and risky passage of a corridor ever attempted by a head accountant. With the utmost caution, he opened the door an inch or two—and, far too distinctly, that nameless little tune which Dixon hummed at intervals came to his ear.

And now the door opened widely and incautiously and James bounded into the corridor snarling. For just as his own hand had been raised a little while ago, so was Dixon's hand raised now, about to knock on Betty's door!

CHAPTER XIV.

RELIEF IN SIGHT.

DREAD things hurtled through James Whitmore's brain in that moment.

His hand slapped automatically to a certain back pocket where, now and then when matters of unusual importance necessitated a personal trip to the bank, reposed a heavy revolver. The pocket was empty just now. His hands opened, clawlike and clutching; his muscles set for the spring. And then, as Dixon's head began to turn, the consciousness of duty whizzed suddenly down upon James; and if his knees trembled with fury, his poker face was restored.

No poker face had Mr. Dixon, however. Mr. Dixon whirled about, and in his eye there was a dreadful flame. Two tremendous strides and Mr. Dixon was once more towering above James.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded.

"Look here, Dixon!" Mr. Whitmore said with remarkable self-control. "A little flirtation is one thing, but—"

"What did I tell you?" Dixon persisted.

"Drat what you told me! It's what I'm telling you now. I—"

"You rotten little rat!" the visitor quivered into James's very face, and it was amazingly plain that he sensed nothing of the suspicious or the compromising in his own situation. "I told you to stay in there—and you had to try it again, didn't you, because you thought I was asleep? Well, I wasn't, Whitmore! I was waiting for something like this and—by the mighty, Whitmore, Curlew or no Curlew, here's where I finish one snake!" Mr. Dixon exploded, his wrath passing all bounds.

And he was upon James Whitmore, and his great fingers had wound around James's throat before the proprietor of the throat could even dodge—and Mr. Whitmore was choking!

Mr. Dixon, as has been noted frequently, was a large man; his fingers, just then, seemed entirely out of proportion, even to himself. They tightened, giving James the definite impression that his head was about to pop off and fly across the corridor. He wished to scream; this he attempted to do, in fact, and he found it quite out of the question, his entire screaming apparatus apparently having been compressed to the thickness of a sheet of ordinary note paper! He also wished to deliver at least two stunning blows at points where they must have affected even Mr. Dixon. This effort, too, he made more successfully in one way since his hard fists did whizz in the Dixon direction; but he discovered at once that, with Dixon holding him thus at arm's length, despite every struggle at least three inches of air remained between fists and goal.

After that, curiously, things in general grew less important. The top of James's head, you see, had just exploded; his eyes, as he understood perfectly, had been squeezed entirely out of his head, and now they were looking at a pitch-black sky, thickly peppered with brilliant stars. Add to this the facts that his spine unquestionably had been broken, and his tongue forced out by the roots, and the lack of importance grows understandable.

James, then was leaving this vale of tears very rapidly, and all he craved, during these final seconds, was just a sight of little Betty and the chance to speak to her once more, assuring her that there was no blond Mrs. Whitmore. This, indeed, was all and, weirdly, it was to be granted him; for where a moment back there had been only a Dixon face, yards broad, leering at him, there was now a Betty face—a sweet face, even distorted in this fashion and jerking about in the air.

Huge black eyes grew smaller and more normal; James found himself trying to twist the thing that had been his own face into a smile. He'd dropped from his floating position in the air, too; his feet were on something hard. He—yes, he seemed to be standing erect, swaying senselessly, but still standing. And his throat was swelling out again, too, and breath came to him in a tremendous gasp and—

"Oh, don't! Don't! Please, please don't!" Betty's voice was pleading somewhere.

"Dog-gone it! I thought I could do it quiet, without you hearing and getting all fussed, kid!" Mr. Dixon was saying bitterly.

"What—what were you doing?"

"Listen here, Betty!" Mr. Dixon said sternly. "It's not a very nice thing to have to explain, but I suppose explaining's the only thing. This dog was trying to get into your room!"

"Oh!" said Betty.

"So—so long as you understand that now, I'd better go on with teaching him what happens to—"

"No—please, please!" Betty cried. "I can't bear it!"

"Can't bear what?"

"Seeing him—suffer!"

"Him?" Mr. Dixon echoed amazedly.

"Any—anything alive!" said Betty, wildly. "I can't watch anything being tortured!"

"But—oh, well, bless your darned, silly, tender little heart!" Mr. Dixon muttered, and thrust James from him. "Stand up there, rat! And if you want to thank anybody for being alive, thank *her*!"

"Well, I—well, I—" James gulped, as he sought to straighten what remained of his collar.

Betty, who had somehow managed to get between them, was a study. In Betty's eye there was the flash of the longing to throw herself upon her husband to mother him and soothe him—and now it was gone, and, though the eyes brimmed tears, they were hard and angry once more. Betty, apparently, had sensed that the evening was not yet finished, for she had removed not so much as one hairpin.

Ah, and now—since James seemed to be recovering—she was drawing away from James once more; and within James some rather warranted warmth was rising.

"Dixon, are you—are you an absolutely irresponsible lunatic?" he gasped.

"Not so's you'd notice it," the visitor responded briefly. "When I see a whelp sneaking up to a girl's door—"

"I want you to drop that rot now, and

I want it dropped in a hurry!" young Mr. Whitmore said, so forcefully that Mr. Dixon's heavy jaw sagged a trifle and he looked puzzled. "I've been trying to get to Miss Banford to ask her about a matter concerning our firm—and whatever they may do in your interesting part of the country, Dixon, hereabout it's customary for a man to speak to one of the stenographers without being subject to mayhem!"

"Looka here, Whitmore! That doesn't fool me a little bit!" said Mr. Dixon. "I may look simple and I may be simple, but when I see a man—"

"The Abingdon matter, Miss Banford?" James interrupted coldly. "You've been working on the papers that Mr. Curlew has at home, and I think those contracts are among them."

"Er—yes."

"You've been through them, I believe? Well, later, I wish to speak to you about them, please," James snapped, and turned on Mr. Dixon. "Now, as to *you*!"

"Don't you worry about—"

"Far be it from me to teach you principles of personal conduct or to make suggestions as to how a guest should comport himself in Mr. Curlew's home; but *you* very apparently *were* trying to force an entrance to Miss Banford's room?"

"I—what's that?" Mr. Dixon gasped.

"I was—"

"We won't discuss it!" James ticked on. "But inasmuch as this firm feels a certain responsibility for its employees, I think, Miss Banford, for your own comfort and safety, that I shall now—*take you home*!"

"What d'y'e mean?" Dixon cried.

"This is her home!"

"I mean, as you understand, with her family, where she will not be molested!" Mr. Whitmore explained, icily.

Then he waited, and it really did seem that, other animosities suspended, little Betty was about to seize upon this chance to retire from the remarkable household. Perchance she would have done that very thing, had not Mr. Dixon, looking more than anything else like a rather frightened schoolboy, thrust his interesting personality into the conversation with:

"Now, hey! Wait! Whitmore, you—"

you've got me all wrong in this matter. Maybe I made a mistake about you, too, and if I did I apologize, and—and I'm sorry I wrung your neck like that! Doesn't hurt any more, does it? No, I didn't really put any strength into it, of course; just trying to scare you, and—about what I started to say, though. The only reason I went to Miss Banford's door was to find out if she was still up and—"

"Pah!" said James.

"It's the fact! It's the truth!" the visitor protested hotly. "What do you think I am, anyway, to—well, what I wanted was to know if she'd just come and take some dictation for an hour, if she wasn't sleepy. Y' see, I've got so much stuff that has to be in shape before morning, and if it's not, there's going to be a lot of bother. And she's not sleepy; anybody can see that!" Mr. Dixon added, inspecting the girl. "I—I say, would you mind working for an hour or so, Miss Banford?"

James's sparkling eye should have communicated orders to his wife; it failed, apparently. There was an instant wherein Betty seemed to hesitate; then, with that familiar, dazzling smile trained upon Mr. Dixon, she was saying:

"Why, no, I don't mind at all, if it's really necessary, Mr. Dixon."

"Well, it is, kid—it is!" the visitor assured her. "Now, will it start a riot if you come into my sitting room? There's a desk and everything there."

"No—of course not," Betty said, almost annoyed, and started toward the door.

Mr. Dixon paused and looked James up and down.

"And—as for you—" he began uncertainly.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" James said, and passed into his own room.

Not, be it said, that he did this because he wished to do it, or that he intended to remain indefinitely in the room while Dixon flirted with his wife in his own quarters. But calm seemed to have settled again upon a household whose master desired calm above all things; and a man whose head has been virtually wrenched from his shoulders may well need a little time in which to compose his thoughts.

A certain qualified serenity came to him more rapidly than he had dared hope. His eyes were working back into their sockets, now, and there was only a numbed and bruised feeling to his maltreated neck. His head was clearing swiftly—almost too swiftly, for his senses were growing more acute by the second. He could hear every move in that accursed Dixon suite, he could in fact hear many sounds that had never even been made, such as sighs and purring noises from Mr. Dixon, and—he'd be eternally blasted if he'd sit here imagining things any longer! James opened his door two inches, and the wonder is that his jealous ear did not extend itself and twine about the casing.

"Late to be working, but I suppose, after all this, we better make some bluff at it—huh, kid? Now this is—say, you've never been out my way, Betty?" Dixon was saying.

Betty, it appeared, admitted that such was the case. Mr. Dixon's heavy tone rumbled on, rising later in:

"Space, you know, and real air! Not like this, Betty! You'd never come back to this again—you'd never want to. Real people to live with, too. Not like the kind you see here. You'd love it out there, kid!"

"Yes!" Betty said, quite enthusiastically.

"Would you—like to see it all?"

"Oh—yes!"

"Well—well—say, listen, Betty!" said Mr. Dixon, and there was a new quiver in his voice. "Why don't you? Why—"

More than this James failed to hear, for there was no more. James, just then, was walking steadily across the corridor and Mr. Dixon had heard him. Mr. Dixon, indeed, was on his feet and met James at the door with:

"Want something?"

"I want about two minutes of private conversation with Miss Banford," James explained, with a smile of deadly sweetness. "It's a firm matter and, I assure you, if it were possible to talk it over in your presence I should do so. But it concerns a client, Dixon, and has no relation on earth to any thing you ever heard about. So, if you will be so good, Miss Banford?"

He beckoned and retired, to the far end of the corridor this time. Betty, without comment, followed him, even closing the Dixon door after her and, quite miraculously, some instinct of delicacy prompted Mr. Dixon to leave it closed and to remain within!

Mr. Whitmore, after one precautionary glance about, bent upon his little wife a stern, inexorable countenance and opened his lips.

"Who is she?" Betty demanded, just then.

"Who—"

"The other woman! The other Mrs. Whitmore!" Betty panted. "Who is she?"

"Oh, there is no—"

"Don't lie to me!" Betty hissed. "I may look simple, like Dixon, Jim, but I'm not an utter fool. Don't gulp at me like that! The woman who is known in this—this house as Mrs. Whitmore!"

"Betty, I tell you there isn't any—"

"Oh, but your partner knows her well! Your—your partner!"

"Betty—" James repeated patiently.

"That was bad enough, but—but another woman!" little Mrs. Whitmore choked, although more with fury than with grief. "I couldn't have believed—either of those things! You—you—oh, were you afraid that I'd spend your wretched money or are you really so cold and dead inside that you can't understand how glad I'd be—how glad I would have been then!—to know that you'd really been taken into the firm, and that—"

"Betty, if you'll hold that confounded little tongue for one minute, I'll try to tell you the truth," James rumbled into her ear.

"I don't believe it!"

"In the first place, there isn't any—why, I feel like an idiot, having to tell you this—there isn't any other Mrs. Whitmore."

"I don't believe that for an instant," Betty said. "Mr. Curlew knows her and she comes here. He doesn't know a person who doesn't exist, and he wasn't lying because you've always told me how he insists upon the truth!"

"So he does, among his employees, but

—but, personally, I think he's the biggest liar alive!" James plodded on. "Anyhow, you'll have to take my word for it that he was lying about that, and that there isn't any—"

"Jimmy!" said little Mrs. Whitmore, and her voice broke suddenly. "Could you do a thing like that?"

"I couldn't and I didn't and—"

"Who is the woman with the beautiful golden hair, then?"

"There is no such woman! And I'm not his partner! D'y'e hear? I'm not his partner! He hired me to pose as his partner for to-night because he needed some one to entertain Dixon and—say, what are you doing here, by the way?"

"I—I—went to see Mr. Mitchell today, and he—he said that a friend of his had a very special job for just such a girl!" Betty said. "To—keep a man busy and in the house—Dixon—and they swore me, actually swore me, to stay here and do all I could and—I'm to get one hundred dollars and—"

"To flirt with that whale?" James demanded.

"I—I haven't been flirting with him. That is, not really. I wouldn't have stayed here at all if you hadn't lied to me!"

"I didn't do that!"

"Oh, yes, you did!" flashed from Betty. "When you thought you were talking to me at home over the telephone—when I was just trying to get you at home and explain some of it and have you tell me how to get out, because I couldn't believe that you really were his partner, even when I heard your voice downstairs and heard him call you that and—"

"Well, I tell you, I'm not! I—" James said savagely.

"Well, I tell you again that I don't believe a word of it!" cried little Mrs. Whitmore. "Because there isn't a thing convincing about you at this minute. You look as if you were trying to carry off some dreadful bluff—and you almost did that a minute ago and—"

"Betty, will you please listen to me for one minute?" James pleaded hoarsely. "We'll have to postpone the explanations and the big scrap, but there are two things

I want you to get *now!* One of 'em is that if Curlew ever discovers that we're married and have been going on like this without admitting it, I'm fired! And the other is that I'm damned if I'll have my wife—"

"Oh!" Betty gasped, and shrank from him. "You've done nothing but curse me all day!"

"I—I'm sorry. You'll have to forgive me again, Betty. Only please understand that my wife's not going to pass the night in any man's sitting room, hearing about the kind of air he breathes at home. Five minutes from now you'll get word that your family needs you," James concluded, and there was a real danger note in his voice; "and when you do get it, kid, you insist that I take you home at once! // Nobody else! *Me!*"

"But—"

"How much of our flat did Dixon see? Does he know you haven't any dying relatives?"

"He didn't see any of it!" Betty cried, indignantly. "Do you suppose—"

"All right! So much the better. When you're sent for, you—"

"But if I leave here, the—the hundred dollars—"

"Well, Elizabeth, *that's* downright disgusting!" James stated. "You get any hundred dollars out of this disgrace and I'll throw it in the fire! I don't care a hoot what happens to Curlew's deal! I don't—will you keep in mind that you're to start the second you're summoned?"

"I—suppose so," Betty said, reluctantly.

"And if that bird happens to get a little bit too gay between now and the time I see you again, I'll kill him on the spot!" Mr. Whitmore ended, pleasantly. "Good-bye, my child!"

He turned away, forestalling further argument; but his heart did throb at the sound of Betty's:

"Are you going to—to be very long, Jimmy?"

"You bet I'm not, Betsy! Not more than five minutes," James cried softly, and, without warning, seized his wife and kissed her fiercely.

And Mr. Dixon's door opened just then and Mr. Dixon stepped out. Further, from

Mr. Dixon's region there came a little startled cry.

"Hey!"

"What's your trouble now?" James asked.

"You—you kissed her!"

"Why, Mr. Dixon!" cried young Mrs. Whitmore.

"Didn't I see him—er—kissing you?" the visitor demanded, uncertainly.

Amazing words trembled upon the lips of James Whitmore—trembled and were swallowed again. He smiled sneeringly.

"Mr. Dixon," he said, coldly, "I think that possibly if you'll get some rest you may get over—er—seeing things."

Lines appeared upon the big man's face. He was studying Betty.

"All the same, I could swear that he kissed you!" he muttered. "And you weren't putting up any awful fight either, y' little rascal!"

And he smiled suddenly; and at another time that smile would have precipitated a combat which could have ended only when one or the other gentleman lay cold and still upon the floor. As it was, a wheeze escaped James—and he fled, for the scandalous situation was all but over with now.

And fleeing, too, he thrilled, for he knew that fundamentally everything was quite all right! In her blessed little heart, Betty understood only too well that there never had been, never could be, any other woman. Of this she had assured him, without words, in the third kiss, the first two having been slightly open to doubt. Once they were back in the dear little flat, there might be a good deal of discussion and some acrimony before the air was finally cleared—but fundamentally, everything was all right!

So James, observing from the corner of his eye that Betty had left the door of the sitting room open at least ten inches, turned the corner and skipped down the rest of the impressive flight almost gayly, whirled about with one hand on the big newel post, and then, rather wisely, brought his gait down to a sedate walk.

If Henry Curlew were awake, James, much as he disliked that sort of thing, was about to lie crisply, convincingly, and to

whatever extent might be required. If Henry, by some happy chance, were not awake—by Jove, he wasn't! James stopped and smiled brightly at the figure of Henry, sprawled, undignified, snoring in his big chair.

So much the better! Then James would scrawl his basic lie on a sheet of paper and leave it near Henry; and as soon as he had rushed little Betty home and himself had rushed back here, he'd give Henry the verbal elaborations galore. Chuckling, young Mr. Whitmore found the paper on the table and looked for a pencil. The note idea was infinitely better, anyway. It saved time and explanation, and precluded the possibility of unfortunate slips in his little scheme. So, therefore—

"Rrrr-ick!" said Henry Curlew, suddenly, this being a cross between a cough and a hiccup.

And he pulled himself up in the chair and regarded James, quite wide awake!

CHAPTER XV.

AID WITHOUT STINT.

ONE wee snarl of annoyance made its way past young Mr. Whitmore's lips.

"Oh!" said he. "I—ah—disturbed you?"

"You—huh? Did you wake me up?"

"Not intentionally."

"Never mind. Glad you did, of course. Don't know how I came to go off like that; I'd quite determined to keep awake that time. Is—is he asleep, James?"

"Not yet, but—"

"The blamed girl is, though?" asked Henry, with a worried smile.

"No, she isn't. She's taking dictation just now, I believe, and—"

"At this hour of the morning and he won't let her go?"

"No, but—"

"Gad! That's fine!" Henry said enthusiastically. "That was an inspiration of mine, having that kid ready for him! That's one of the brightest things I've ever done! The man's nailed down fast and—"

"Well, he'll have to stay down of his

own accord for a while, I'm afraid," James thrust in desperately. "Miss Banford is needed at home immediately."

"She's—*what*?"

"Her aunt, you know."

"The—the sick one?"

"Yes, they want Miss Banford at once. She'll have to go!"

Henry Curlew pulled himself quite out of the chair and lurched to James's side.

"Are you sure about this?" he gasped.

"I answered the telephone myself," young Mr. Whitmore lied readily.

"Well—did you get the address? Did you find out where she lives?"

"Eh? Of course!" James said impatiently. "They—ah—gave it to me; they wanted Miss Banford sent home in a taxi and—"

"Whitmore!" croaked the master of the house, very wide awake now. "Has the girl been told?"

"Not yet," Mr. Whitmore said, unguardedly. "I am just going to do that. I was leaving a note for you, so that you'd know what had become of me if you woke up, but so long as I've been able to explain—" he pursued, and moved toward the door again and would have passed through it had not Henry, with remarkable alacrity, hopped after him and clutched his arm and, with soundless speed, closed the door.

These things done, he glared at James.

"Say, Whitmore, is it a fact that you haven't a grain of intelligence?" he asked unpleasantly. "Sometimes I think that—upon my word, I do, Whitmore! *That girl mustn't know!*"

"But her aunt is—"

"Dying, I take it?" Henry rasped, brutally.

"Yes!"

"Can the girl stop her dying?"

"Eh?" choked James.

"She's not a physician or a trained nurse? She has no possible knowledge or capability that could stave off the—er—unfortunate termination of the trouble?"

"Why—why, probably not!" young Mr. Whitmore confessed.

"Then all that could be gained by telling her would be to distress her, to send her on

a heart-breaking, distracting errand *and*—to unfit her for her present job here?"

"If you put it that way, yes," said James, indignantly. "But it's natural for—er—a family to wish to have her at a time like this. I really think, sir, that—"

"No, you don't, Whitmore; I'm almost certain of that now. If you really thought, you'd have wakened me at once, so that together we might have found a way of keeping the girl in ignorance and still—um—doing the right thing, so far as possible. Instead of that, you—well, never mind! Never mind!" Henry hurried on, testily. "Now, just what is the nature of this trouble?"

"I have no idea!"

"But it actually *is* serious?"

"Whoever telephoned said that the lady had not more than two hours to live."

"I don't believe it," the master of the house said with a grim cackle. "Never yet saw a case where a person had only two hours to live that they didn't pull through it and spend the next twenty years telling about it. However, I'm not heartless, Whitmore—please don't think that. I'm interested in Dixon and—I say, these people are in modest circumstances, I take it?"

"I suppose so," James said, and his voice was growing thinner and thinner.

"That means they're forced to do without the best kind of medical attendance, Jim. That one fact may account for most of it and the other fact, that we're forced to keep the news from the girl, may very well prove the means of saving the woman's life!"

"Eh?"

"Because if we must deny the unfortunate person the benefit of Miss Banford's presence, at least we can do everything else humanly possible to aid her!" Mr. Curlew cackled feverishly, and made his way to the wall safe and busily spun the combination dial. "Here, Whitmore! Come here!"

Rather dizzily, James approached as the thick little door swung open and Henry reached in. More dizzily, James noted the appearance of a bundle of yellow bills in Henry's thin hand; and now the fingers were flipping swiftly along the edges and Henry was muttering:

"One—one-fifty—two hundred—three—four—five hundred dollars—no, better take seven, Jim. There it is, seven hundred dollars!"

"For what?"

"For specialists, Whitmore!" Henry said with forced patience. "For oxygen tanks and nurses and operations and whatever else may commend itself to the competent medical gentlemen it will be your job to rush to the stricken lady's bedside. I owe that girl something, Jim! I want you to get the very best there is in the way of care—and if there's not enough cash there to serve through the rest of the night, come back and get more."

"You—you want *me* to go and attend to all this?" James stuttered.

"The thought, mercifully, has penetrated!" Henry Curlew said with a small and ominous smile. "I do indeed desire this. Don't spare expense, so that there's a chance of saving the woman and keeping the kid upstairs correspondingly happy. If it runs into two or three thousand, that's all right, and the check will be handed to-morrow morning to the man who earns it. And if you feel, Whitmore, that you're able to muster a little speed in this emergency—just a little, you know, before the woman actually does die—"

He took James's arm and led him to the door and down the corridor. He ducked nimbly out of sight and, quite magically, produced the slightly bewildered James's hat and coat and rushed him into them. With his own hand, then, Henry Curlew very softly opened the door and thrust James into the night.

"Don't do any telephoning, either, Whitmore!" he hissed. "I won't risk having that combination up there smashed. Bring back the news yourself—and I hope it may be good news!"

The door closed.

James Whitmore, upon the sidewalk, noting the vanishing shadow of Henry Curlew within—James sent out upon the clear, early morning air a futile and vicious snort of baffled fury!

Verily, he had most cleverly contrived a vast improvement in general conditions with his neat little lie.

He was outside now and Betty was inside—all alone, up there in the sitting room, with a lout whose latest impression was that Betty, the little rascal, was not difficult to kiss! The fact that this impression was largely of his own making did nothing to render less savage James's second, third and fourth snorts. With every one else in the house asleep, Betty was up there and—and he'd go back! He started up the steps and halted again.

Just what new lie would he attempt when he did go back? He didn't know; an inefficient liar at any time, failure had shaken James's nerve. Then he'd tell the truth, perchance, and see what happened? There was so little difficulty in forecasting just what would happen! When he had told the truth, he would be jobless; when he had told the truth in Dixon's presence, and doubtless he would be forced to do that, he would have shattered the whole Dixon deal and gained an enemy for life in Henry Curlew—and Henry was not a man lightly to be antagonized. And yet, if he did not do one of these things—

The only reason James failed to wring his hands in this juncture was that he had never learned how. He glared at the front door. He glared up the front of the house. There was a light on the second floor and somebody behind the curtains, possibly watching him. Betty? It might equally well be Dixon—and once Dixon began to wonder actively why the alleged junior partner was standing around the sidewalk at this hour, new excitement might have its beginning. James, then, commenced to walk, but not as one hurrying to a death-bed.

Well—he had brought it about all by himself! He looked feverishly up at the sitting room window again and looked away as swiftly. Somebody was indeed watching him. James squared his shoulders and stepped out briskly, turned the corner—slowed down again—halted—looked back irresolutely at the corner—and having spent thirty seconds thus, turned and walked slowly on again.

The police officer materialized, apparently, from thin air. He had not been there and now he was there, looking at James

with keen eyes which, after the first glance, seemed satisfied. A friendly officer, too, for he said:

"Nice morning."

"Eh? Oh, yes," James agreed.

"Kind o' crisp!"

"Rather."

The officer—he had just assimilated the fact of James's evening clothes—yawned.

"Which way you going?" he queried.

"East," James said shortly. "Why?"

"Keep an eye open, chief, if you're carrying valuables—that's all!" the officer grinned. "Just as well to be careful, y'know."

"Eh? What's wrong?"

"Nothing at all, most likely, only it don't do no harm to be careful. There's a gang working the neighborhood, I guess; it was read out to us when we went on post. I haven't seen anything."

"Well—thanks!" James muttered as he passed on.

Here, indeed, was a cheering thought. In his pocket reposed seven hundred dollars of Henry Curlew's money and another fifty of his own; what could be more sweetly appropriate to this particular night than to find a blackjack descending on his skull from behind—to find himself waking up later in the gutter, with a possible fracture and empty pockets? Nothing, in sooth; nothing could be more in harmony with the rest of the night! James glanced back furtively; the officer was still gazing after him.

Aye, a pleasing idea, with many merry concomitants! James, you see, might be an amateur liar, but he was no thief. So far as any plans had formed within the apparently threatened skull, he had no intention of keeping any of Henry's seven hundred dollars; normally, they'd be returned to the wall safe, with whatever explanation. But once James had been properly beaten into insensibility and the seven hundred taken, it would have to be returned; that might not be practical common sense, but James knew himself and knew that, should he of course recover, it would become a point of honor. And when seven hundred dollars had been subtracted from the none too robust savings bank account—James, in the

act of shuddering, started and looked over his shoulder.

Whether this latest individual, plainly not an officer, had materialized like the policeman or had been hiding in an areaway, he could not guess, but he was just approaching the shoulder from behind. He was crouched, too, and moving rapidly, noiselessly, like the predatory beast he must have been.

And James, teeth bared, hesitated for just one instant—contemplated a splendid battle on the spot—reflected that, above and beyond all things, he most wished to regain the shelter of the roof which covered Betty—reflected further that there would be just one utterly certain outcome to a bare-fisted battle with a gang of thugs armed to the eyes. Then James ran!

Swiftly, incredibly did James run, and he was a good runner. Down the entire block went James, after the fashion of a fear-maddened antelope and, for the first time in years, across a street intersection without looking either way for possible automobiles! On ran James and on, for another fifty feet—and then a hand came down upon his shoulder and James stopped short.

The other man, who was almost as large as Mr. Dixon, leered triumphantly at him. James's quick fist went back—and came forward again—and was caught at the wrist and so held in a grip as tight as in the traditional vise.

"I guess we won't have any of that, buddy!" the other said with remarkable calm. "Just lemme look you over!"

He twirled young Mr. Whitmore about. Ever so deftly, his hand passed over Mr. Whitmore's person, whisking past back pockets and side pockets and the region where a shoulder holster might have hung. He turned young Mr. Whitmore back again, too, and examined his evening attire and incidentally, it is to be presumed, his face, which was not a criminal type.

"Hum!" said he.

"What the—what—"

"Police officer," the other explained briefly, and James caught the flash of the shield in his palm. "What was the idea of running?"

"I thought it was a hold-up, of course," James panted. "What d'ye mean by jumping out like that at—"

"We're looking for somebody," smiled the other, with an unruffled monumental calm. "You started kind of sudden, without giving me a chance to talk to you, you know."

And he favored James with what was meant for an apologetic nod and added:

"Next time don't run till you know what you're running from. Sorry! Good morning!"

His interest had died as suddenly as it had appeared. He turned and sauntered back slowly in the direction from which they had come. Young Mr. Whitmore, breathing normally again, walked on also. But it wasn't a nice neighborhood. The startling abruptness with which good neighborhoods turn to poor neighborhoods on the upper East Side impressed James afresh. There were looming flat houses of the cheaper order on either side of this extremely dark block. Up there was a single lighted window, partly opened, and from it came the faint, rather sickening squawk of a woman in some sort of distress and the coarser tones of a man. James faced about and retraced his steps. If things grew worse in the same ratio over this way, two blocks more would find people being murdered in the open street!

One hand on Curlew's seven hundred dollars, then, he made his way back to the deserted but reasonably decent avenue and turned north. He was fuming again, about little Betty, alone with Dixon in that accursed sitting room.

James knew men; he knew the look that had been in Dixon's eye when he voiced the opinion that Betty really had not struggled. He knew now—and his blood boiled at the knowledge—that unless he was misjudging Mr. Dixon very grievously, it would not be long before the visitor took to experimenting with kisses on his own account.

Then why—*why*, if there was a spark of manhood left in him, had James ever permitted himself to be thrust from the house? Well, in part, perhaps, because of that really bewildered sense of defeat which had accompanied the dire failure of his little lie—

and because, after all, a refusal to go to the aid of the mythical aunt might well have brought exposure and ruin—but mainly because the realization of Betty's risk had not been nearly so keen in the house as it was here in the still street.

How—severally and profanely qualified—long did a man have to roam the night to consume approximately the time a man would have consumed in getting specialists? James whinnied strangely and consulted his watch; three o'clock was approaching now and, looking about, he observed that in his excitement he had traveled farther north than he had intended—as far, at all events, as he intended traveling now. James wheeled about and made for Fifth Avenue, not quite at a run.

Gorely, a tottering wreck of a butler, appeared long after James had rung the Curlew bell. James tossed hat and coat aside, listened, heard nothing, stalked into the library; and Henry Curlew dragged up a sagging, wabbling head and confronted him with awful, deep set eyes. Henry's expression, which was that of a man determined to stick out the night if it costs his life, was a fearsome thing to see.

"How is she now?" he croaked.

"Better—much better."

"Out of danger?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven for that. I knew it was a false alarm. They always are," asserted Henry's deep-throated cackle, and he heaved an utterly exhausted sigh. "Get specialists, Whitmore?"

"They were not necessary," James said shortly. "There's the money, by the way."

"You weren't gone long."

"I hurried."

"She lives near, then?" Henry yawned.

"Quite."

If he was somewhat curt, Henry failed to take account of the fact. Elbow on table, hand bracing head, Henry's fishy eyes drooped.

"How is she, Mr. Curlew?" James asked.

"Miss Banford, I mean?"

Ten seconds more and, unchecked, Henry would have attained blessed oblivion; now he dragged his eyes open and rolled back his head as he mumbled:

"Huh? What? Banford? She—she's all right, I suppose. She shrieked—just once!"

CHAPTER XVI.

STERNE MEASURES.

JAMES WHITMORE'S hair stood straight on end.

"She did what?" he gasped.

"Eh? Shrieked. She—"

"When?"

Henry sat up and forced his way back to the world of conscious things.

"When? Why—why, five minutes after you went out, I suppose. Something like that. Or—it may have been a squeal. Or possibly a laugh. Now I think of it, I believe—"

"Well, what made her shriek?" James demanded savagely. "What did he say when you went up?"

"Dixon, you mean?"

"Certainly!"

"He said nothing at all to me, because I didn't go up," Mr. Curlew answered quite sharply and was at last fully awake, even again.

"Do you mean to tell me that, without raising a finger to assist her, you permitted a young girl to be—"

"Say, Whitmore! Just stop there, will you?" Henry snapped. "What the devil's all this about, anyway? The confounded girl wasn't screaming for help! I've been trying to tell you that she was—er—apparently laughing, Whitmore, and—"

"You said she shrieked."

"I was semiconscious when I said it, and it was the first that came to my lips," Mr. Curlew said with exceeding crispness. "And whether she laughed or shrieked or got up and cheered, why all this concern on your part?"

"It is simply that I feel that, in a house like this—or any other house, for the matter of that—common propriety demands—"

"I'll look after the demands of common propriety in this house, which chances to be my own!" the lord of the place responded. "This Dixon, as I understand him—and I make few mistakes about men, Whit-

more—is a white citizen peculiarly susceptible to a pretty girl, or to that one at least. Do you imagine for one instant that if I suspected him of being the type that might have designs on the kid I'd be sitting here complacently?"

"Not doing it deliberately, perhaps," James said stubbornly. "But at the same time, Mr. Curlew, you're very tired and your—ah—perceptions may not be as acute as usual and—"

"Dammit, sir! I'll attend to my perceptions and I'll attend to what happens in my home, without your assistance!" Henry rapped out. "And whether I'm able to do those things or not, why this tremendous excitement of *yours*?"

"I feel—"

"Whitmore, you're nothing but a confounded mushy hypocrite! That frisky little jade's turned your head more than she has Dixon's! You're jealous! That's what's the matter with you? You're jealous—of that type of woman."

"That type of woman?" roared from James. "What d'ye mean by—"

"I mean what I say, sir, and don't you dare bellow like that at me!" Henry Curlew said, and rose very suddenly from his chair and confronted James with fury in his eye. "Your beastly infatuation's driving you crazy! You're positively worthless for the purpose that brought you here! Why, Whitmore, you look as if you were going to burst at this minute! Instead of having a poker face, you look as if you were going to have apoplexy! You—"

"All right. Pardon me!" said James, and his remarkable mask, a little redder than usual, returned to duty. "May I ask one thing?"

"If there's a grain of sense in it—yes, I suppose so," Henry said bitterly.

"Are you going to permit him to—er—dictate right through the night? Or to talk to that girl?"

Henry restrained himself, albeit his thin chest moved rather rapidly.

"If I am, the girl's being well paid to listen to him," he said. "If she grows tired, she at least has brains enough to communicate that fact to him and—say, Whitmore, just *what* do you suppose your wife would

think of this conversation? Or had you forgotten that you have a wife?"

"No!"

Then, for several seconds, they confronted one another, each apparently filled with richly emotional thoughts. Henry shrugged his shoulders and sat down again.

"Go upstairs again and don't go to bed until you're sure Dixon himself's in bed and asleep!" he ordered briefly. "Keep away from 'em! D'ye hear?"

"I hear."

"And see that he doesn't break loose and get out of the house. No, no—no! I understand that he's not likely to do that, but I've given up trying to guess what any one will do next. And if he should insist on going, see that you go with him and remain with him till you can get him back here. Try to remember that I'm paying *you* mighty well, too!"

"Very well," James said shortly.

One thin, disgusted hand waved him toward the door. James went.

His muscles tightened as he ascended the stairs, too. The door of Mr. Dixon's sitting room, he had no doubt, would be closed now. Well, it was due to open again and without warning; and if, in there, James found one solitary thing to suggest what seemed all too probable, a big man was about to suffer at the hands of a smaller man! Aye, and suffer all the smaller man could inflict, even to extinction! There would be no grabbing at throats this time; it would be mere brute force against a reasonable amount of skill and an immeasurable amount of rage, and if the latter combination failed to come out the victor—here James, at the top of the stairs, quieted down abruptly.

The door was open, just as it had been open at his departure. More than this, both Dixon and little Betty were fully visible; and the most remarkable thing of all was that Dixon, tilted back and smoking, was reading something from a paper, while little Betty jotted down swift notes in her little book.

To young Mr. Whitmore's forehead beads of perspiration oozed. The hectic tinge left his poker face. He walked, at an almost normal gait, past the door and to the room

where, ostensibly, he meant to slumber a little later. Door open a trifle, he fluttered into a chair and felt, shakily, for a cigarette.

It was all right. At least, it was all right to some extent—to whatever extent a situation like this could be all right. Young Mr. Whitmore himself tilted back and relaxed; and relaxed still further. It was a mightily grateful sensation, this one of relaxing.

Eh? Dixon had stopped his steady mumbling now, though. He was talking to Betty and James's sixth sense, developed this night, informed him that Dixon was not talking business. Some of the delights of James's relaxation departed and he listened again.

"Think we'd better go on with that contract, Mr. Dixon?" Betty was asking.

"Oh, we must have worked half an hour that stretch," the visitor laughed. "No use killing ourselves or—say, Betty!"

"Yes?"

"How much longer are you going to keep up this formal stuff?"

"What do you mean?" Betty's sweet, low voice inquired, the while Betty's husband, eyes glaring, rose from his chair.

"Call me George, kid!" urged the visitor. "Everybody out home calls me George."

"Well, I think—"

"Oh, I know. It's not like that around New York. Here you know a man for a thousand years—and he's still 'Mr. Smith.' But you and I are pretty well acquainted now, Betty, and we're going to be a lot better acquainted. Oh, yes, we are and—say, I think you've got the prettiest hands, kid!"

Now, there had been no deliberate intention on Mr. Whitmore's part of leaving his room—just yet. In spite of this, he was in the corridor; he was, in fact, almost at the door of Dixon's suite. More than this, Betty's startled eye met his and Betty was rising; and as she rose the eye grew less startled and acquired a more scintillant, glinting effect.

"Oh, Mr. Whitmore, about that matter—yes!" Betty said. "Will you excuse me just for a moment, Mr. Dixon?"

"George!" corrected Mr. Dixon.

"George, then." Betty dimpled as she passed out.

"You come over in my room for this talk," James hissed from the corner of his mouth.

"I was going to do that," little Mrs. Whitmore responded in a vibrant whisper.

Mr. Dixon, it seemed, was following them with his eyes at least; a chair moved in his room and James caught the sound of his slipped feet. But there were other things on James's mind as he bowed his wife into the room across the hall, although with commendable repression he kept them in until the door had all but closed behind them. Then:

"What the—"

"*Don't you dare!*" flashed from Betty.

"What—what d'ye mean by calling that hulk 'George'?" James amended, with a gulp.

"What do you mean by putting me in a position where I'm forced to call him 'George'?" little Mrs. Whitmore inquired with almost equal warmth.

"Betty—"

"You—you deserted me! You did it deliberately!"

"I—"

"You did! You said you were going to get me out of it, and you just left the house!" Betty panted. "I saw you go!"

"Let me tell you—"

"You can't tell me anything, Jim Whitmore!" that person's wife flared, surprisingly. "I know now! I *know!* I—I—I've tried so hard not to believe it—and it's so!"

"What is?"

"That you're hand in glove with Curlew in this whole—whole nasty mess! That you think more of a dollar than you do of—do of *me!*" Betty gulped. "You saw that he liked me—I mean Dixon—and you're both making the most of it. You—you'd sell your wife for—"

"Don't go too far, Betty!" James interrupted savagely. "There are some things that aren't to be said, even in hysteria!"

"I'm not hysterical! I know now! I *know!*"

"You know nothing of the kind! I—"

"Didn't you leave the house immediately after you left me?"

"I did, but—"

"Didn't you, literally, do it to throw me

into that man's company and keep me there?"

"No!" choked young Mr. Whitmore. "I did it because—"

"Don't lie to me!"

"I'm not lying to you, and this thing isn't all one sided! I—"

"No, it's not!" Betty broke in with a small and dreadful laugh. "You may have your beastly schemes and your blond women, but I—do you know, I think I really like him!"

"What?"

"I do! I think I like him more every minute. He's big and wholesome; I think there isn't a mean streak in him!" cried Betty, and eyed her husband in the most remarkable way. "He would no more think of deserting his wife, of leaving her to another man than—than the man I thought you to be would have done such a thing!"

By this time, be it said, James Whitmore's heart had stopped. Momentarily, the fury within him gave place to a surge of cold fear. He had been about to speak most strongly; instead, his undertone trembled.

"Betty—little kid! You don't know what you're saying! I'll get you out of here without ruining us, even if I have to—"

"What? Oh! Don't bother!" little Mrs. Whitmore said sharply. "I could have done that myself, if I'd really wished to give up all—all the money. In fact, I meant to do it, if you tried and failed. I meant simply to insist on going home."

"Well, do that now and—"

"No, I'm not anxious to go home now!" Betty stated. "I was until—until I knew that you'd really deserted me—until you went out and didn't come back for so long! Then I understood!"

"No, you didn't, Betty. You—"

"I understood so well that—that something inside seemed to die!" Betty added, and there were tears in her voice for an instant. "And he has told me so much about his country and it sounds so real, so peaceful, so—"

"Betty, I want you to stop that!" James gasped.

"Perhaps you do. Perhaps you just think you do," said little Mrs. Whitmore.

"Really, I'm pretty sure, you'd be glad to see me—oh, just disappear and get out of your life, so you could have your blond women—but you'd always feel that you'd driven me to it, wouldn't you?" she laughed, unpleasantly. "I think you have conscience enough for that!"

James Whitmore swallowed hard before speech was possible.

"Honey," he managed then, "you don't seem to understand what's going on here and I'm not to blame—and that's all I can tell you now. But when I've managed to get you loose and home, without throwing up my job and everything else—"

"Oh, you still insist that you're trying to do that?"

"Betty, I swear it! We got into this mess separately and I'll get us out of it together."

"By deserting me again? By throwing me into that man's arms?"

"No! By—"

And there James stopped short, for there were voices in the hall; indeed, as occurred to him suddenly, there had been voices in the hall for half a minute or so. One of them was Dixon's.

"... thought it was better to get down there and find you, Mr. Curlew. I've got no use for that sort of thing!"

"You were right," said Henry's incisive murmur.

"It doesn't look right and it isn't right, for a man like that—a member of the firm—to lure an innocent little girl like her into his room!" Dixon went on angrily. "If he'd been any one else but a member of the firm and a friend of yours, or if this hadn't been your house, I'd have gone in there and wrung his neck, once I heard him bawling the kid out like that. But—"

"My dear chap, may I attend to this?"

Henry asked almost sweetly.

"Betty!" breathed James. "When I come for you, you start!"

"If I—trust you just this one time more—" was all that Betty could murmur before the door swung open.

Mr. Dixon, an angry red, was there. So was Henry, and Henry wore a curious pallor. One dread glance transfixed James Whitmore as Curlew said:

"Er—Jim, it's a trifle late, of course, but may I consult you for a few moments, *downstairs?*"

"I—"

"It is on a matter of business. It is urgent business!" Henry explained further and waved Miss Banford out of the room, and watched her cross the hall at Dixon's side, and then fastened upon James's sleeve the steel talon that was his hand. "Business," he breathed as he led the way toward the stairs, "of the very most urgent nature!"

James moved without the slightest resistance. For the moment he was dazed—yes, just dazed. That little Betty ever could have contemplated, ever have voiced such sentiments! That little Betty—he turned his head toward the Dixon sitting room for an instant and caught a glimpse of little Betty, smiling adorably as she resumed her chair. Then they were drifting along the lower hall toward the library—and now they had stopped.

"Whitmore," said Henry Curlew, "I want to retract one statement I made a little while ago."

"You—yes?"

"I said that I rarely made mistakes in men. The implication was, of course, that I never made them. I was wrong, Whitmore. I have made one of the gravest mistakes of my whole life in *you!*"

"You mean—"

"I refer to your latest, your final, asinine performance with that woman upstairs—yes! Incredible as it appears, your guess is correct. I make no comments, Whitmore. I cannot trust myself to speak freely and point out what you have probably accomplished in the way of rousing and irritating a

man I would give, literally, thousands of dollars to see either happy and placid or asleep. It never came to me that the love bug might possibly bite an apparent iceberg like yourself, Whitmore—but there I erred again, bitterly, terribly. Given time, I have no doubt that your ingenuity could devise other ways of irritating Dixon, but the time will not be given! Whitmore, I esteemed you an unusually bright young man. You're an absolute, stupid jackass! Get out of here!"

"Are you—dismissing me?"

"From your job at the office? No, probably not. The fault in this matter is largely mine, and I confess it. But your presence in this house for another fifteen minutes promises so surely to cost me Dixon that—get out!"

"What if I refuse to get out?"

"What if you what? Why—why, dammit, sir, I'll call Gorely and the second man and the chef and the houseman and have you thrown out!" Henry rasped, and the wrath of his countenance chilled the bewildered James. "I'll call the police and have you dragged out! I'll—say! When I tell you to get out of my house, you're going! D'ye hear? *You're going!*"

And now, years and supposed weakness notwithstanding, he laid upon James hands of such violence that James was shoved bodily into the corridor. Aye, and once in motion, James was pushed, stumbling, gasping, down the corridor to the door—and Henry, one hand on his collar, clutched him and jerked open the door.

And now James Whitmore was on the upper step, spinning around insanely—and his hat and coat were thrown out after him and the door slammed!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



FIRST LOVE

HOW humorous the errors

We make upon our way!

You were the prologue and

I thought you were the play!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



Her Hero

By KETURAH ELLIOT

PERHAPS I ought to reform my ways. My children disapprove of them, and they do get me into scrapes sometimes from which only extreme adroitness extricates me. However, I have developed a sinuosity in standing from under which serves me well, and danger but adds zest to poking about in other people's private affairs, to one of my kidney. For I admit I'm nose-y. The prinks and pranks of my fellow men afford me the keenest delight, consequently I try to find out all about them. How better can it be done than by associating with any one who permits the probing of their secret hearts? I will say for myself, however, that I never "kiss and tell," as the saying is—nor do I tell on myself. So I walk serenely, though my children scold.

I never told, for instance, that I once answered a matrimonial advertisement. I was in San Francisco in 1911 or 1912—I

forget which—and I saw it in the *Sunday Chronicle*. Its stark simplicity challenged me. It ran thus:

I WOULD like to marry a veteran of the Civil War. Box X, *Chronicle*.

I wrote at once to the lady, assuring her that I was a widower, fat, bald, with married children; that nothing could induce me to marry were I a veteran of the Civil War, which I was not, but I had sensed some reason for her advertisement which did not meet the eye, and was interested. Would she tell me, and might I call?

The answer came immediately, laconic as the advertisement:

DEAR SIR:

Pa died, and I was lonesome. You may call.

Yours truly,

SUSAN MADDOX, R. F. D. 12.

My business takes me up and down and roundabout the State of California, so I had

no difficulty in locating Susan's ranch, and I was in festive mood as my flivver climbed the grade that led to it. The house was an old fashioned sprawly thing, with two doors opening on a porch that ran the length of the front. One led to a wing at the end, evidently the kitchen; the other was in the middle, the door of state, I judged, and there I knocked.

It was the end door which opened, however, and a brusque voice demanded my business. I turned at the sound, to find confronting me a most magnificent figure of a woman—black eyes, black hair, white skin, red lips—but a formidable one. She was scowling fiercely, and from her right hand dangled an impressive revolver.

I all but threw up my hands in my surprise. Indeed, I feared I had chanced upon some dangerous lunatic, and repented my coming.

"I am Mr. Burt, who wrote you," I managed to stammer.

The girl stared at me, still scowling for what seemed minutes, then gradually her features relaxed to the pleased scrutiny a child gives the new and interesting. Finally she smiled.

"Well, you *are* tubby like," she said, "but you're real handsome," and, shifting her gun, she gave me a hearty handclasp.

I was relieved, but still uncertain. She made no explanation whatsoever, merely inviting me in.

"Come right into the kitchen," she said. "I'm in the midst of a batch of doughnuts, but I'll finish in a few minutes, and then we'll come out here and eat some."

She seemed unconscious of anything outlandish in her greeting; did not, indeed, refer to her gun, though I did seat myself until she had swung it on a nail over the sink. She was apparently satisfied with me, even if I was uncertain about her, for she went at once to her cakes.

"I don't know as there is anything nicer than a hot doughnut and a glass of milk," she said as she turned the cakes; "but I don't know's I'd trouble to make them for myself. I make them in memory of paw. Paw was awful fond of doughnuts, and it's a comfort, seems though."

I assured her that to continue in the

small familiar services of love, though their object were no longer here, softened pain.

"Yes, it does," she agreed, her eyes filling with tears. "Paw went so sudden. You see, he'd take a little nip now and then. We used to fight about it, but he would tiddle, and so one day when he wasn't steady on his legs he started out to dynamite stumps in the wood lot. I tried to stop him.

"Don't you go, paw,' I says. 'You're tipsy.'

"Shut up!' he yells; and off he goes.

"I didn't dare say anything more, but I was afraid he'd hurt himself; so I sneaked along after him. It looked from a distance as though he set the charge all right, but he must have cut the fuse too short, because he barely turned around before it went off, and a big rock smashed him in his head."

In the face of such tragedy I felt futile, but I offered what sympathy I could. The poor girl wept silently for a while, then controlled herself with abruptness that took will.

"Let's go out on the porch and have some doughnuts," she invited. Fortified with a plate of golden cakes and a pitcher of milk, we settled ourselves comfortably on the steps, and I waited for Susan to continue her story. I confess my curiosity was stinging my tongue with questions, but I locked them behind my teeth. She needed no prompting from me, though. It seemed a relief to unburden her heart, and my cunning ability to pluck secrets from out the locked breast was superfluous.

"Paw and me were pals," she began. "Maw died when I was eight—she was his second—so we had to take care of each other. Maw wanted me to be educated; but, my goodness, paw needed me, so I just had to stop school. I was all he had. I could cook a little, and he helped me learn the rest. Then he taught me how to run the ranch, and even as a little thing I could milk the cow and take care of the chickens. Two years ago I learned to plow. My—how paw laughed the first time I tried! Since then I've done most of the plowing. Paw didn't always feel able. He was always able to go hunting, though," Susan

chuckled, "and he used to take me along if I could leave. He taught me to shoot one of the first things. I can shoot with each hand and from the hip, too. Paw was awful fond of guns, and we've got a regular arsenal in the parlor. He got that from the war. He was just a young fellow when it broke out, and he served all through. Fought for the Union, he did. I tell you, paw was a hero."

She made her assertion with shining eyes, but I had my doubts, privately. It seemed to me she had been allowed to work very hard, while her father enjoyed himself.

"Paw was crazy about the war. He'd buy all the books about it he could, and we'd read them aloud. He'd tell all his experiences too, and show me where the big generals made mistakes. He thought he'd write a book himself. We'd sit night after night and plan it out, but my goodness—how we did quarrel! Paw had a great imagination, so he made his yarns bigger and bigger, with him always on top. Sometimes I'd say, 'Paw, you're lying,' and he'd get mad and yell, 'Who was there, I'd like to know?' Then we'd fight."

Susan sighed. "Oh, it was grand! Paw made everything interesting. I never got tired of his stories."

She paused, with such a look of sadness in her deep eyes I longed to comfort her.

"Child," I said, "you've had a hard blow."

"Yes," she answered simply. "When he died I was just crazy for a while. The neighbors wanted me to move to town or have some one stay here, but I just couldn't. Not after paw."

"Yet you were terribly lonely?" I suggested, feeling I was near the explanation I had come to find.

"Lonely! I should say I was. For a while I was frantic. That's how I came to put that advertisement in the paper. Seemed as if I could get some comfort from some one who had done the same things paw had. But as soon as I had sent it off I knew it was silly. No one could take paw's place or be like him."

"Did you get any answers besides mine?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," she said, scowling her fierce scowl.

Here was dangerous ground, I felt, but I simply had to know more. I could not repress my question, "What came of it?"

"Well, there. I wasn't ever going to tell, but I reckon I can tell you. One day a man came to the front door, just like you, and I came to the kitchen door because I was baking bread. And a good thing I was, too. He was big and ugly, with a nasty look. He stared at me as bold as bold, then he says: 'I've come to marry you.'

"Get out," I says. He never budged.

"I'm the drummer boy of Shilo,' he says. 'You've contracted to marry a vet, and I'm here to marry you.'

"Well, I wouldn't marry you if you was the last man on earth,' I told him.

"Guess you'll marry me,' he says, and gave me a look.

"I'd never been afraid of anything before, but somehow he scared me. Of course I knew he was a fraud, but I could see he meant business. He was a bad man. I didn't know what to do. I'd stepped right out to face him, and now I couldn't either turn around and run or back away. He had me in a trap. My mind just whirled around. I knew I must wheedle him some way till I could get a chance to run, so I fell back on strategy. Paw was great on strategy. He'd say, 'Always fight; but if you can't, use strategy.' Somehow I managed to laugh, sort of giggle like; and I says, 'Why, now, ain't you the masterful man? You scared me, coming at me that way, and made me mad. My goodness! Do you think a girl likes to be proposed to out of a clear sky? I might marry you, but we've got to talk it over.'

"With that I walks past him and sat down on the step here. I could make a run for it from here. He came and stood on the ground in front of me, looking kind of amused, but just as nasty as ever.

"What's there to talk over?' he says.

"I looked just as silly as I could. 'Why, a girl likes to be courted before she's proposed to,' I says. 'You may think because I put that advertisement in the paper that I'm not romantic, but I am.'

"'If it's hugging and kissing you want—' he starts in.

"Then a miracle happened. My bread was burning, and the smell came 'way out here. It gave me my chance.

"'Oh, my bread—my bread!' I screeches, and made for the kitchen.

"It only took a second to grab my gun. I keep it there always. I was weak as water, but I braced up and peeked out the window. The man was standing under that peach tree with a terrible smirk on his face. He sure expected me to come out again, and I did. I stepped out on the porch.

"'Have a peach,' I says, and with my gun nipped one almost onto his nose. 'Have another?' I says, and dropped one behind him."

"What did he do?" I demanded as Susan paused.

"What do you suppose?" she returned.

"Extended himself some, I'll bet," I chortled.

"Reckon he did," she admitted.

"There was another one," she went on—"a little bit of a wizened old thing. He came up with little bows, just smiling his head off.

"'I've come to marry you, lady,' he says. 'I'm an old vet.'

"'Are you the drummer boy of Shilo?' I asks.

"'I be!'

"'Well, I declare,' I says. 'Were you with Grant when he surrendered to Lee?'

"'I were.'

"'I pretended I was all bowled over.

"'Don't tell me you were with Sheridan when he retreated from the sea,' I says.

"'I were,' he pipes up again.

"I laughed right out. He was sure comical.

"'Pick some peaches and get out, you poor old impostor,' I told him."

During the whole of her recital Susan's expression had been vividly animated, reflecting each emotion as she relived her experiences. Now it settled again into her forbidding scowl.

"That little shrimp stood there with his mouth open for a minute," said she fiercely; "then he screeched:

"'Lady, lady, the man at the saloon'—that's Mike Flannigan, at the foot of the grade—'said you'd marry me and give me a good home if I said I was a vet.'"

"How did Flannigan know?" I asked.

"The whole town knew, I reckon," Susan ground out, "because I was a fool and told the postmistress what I was going to do. But I fixed that bunch."

I knew she had done something, from her look of vindictive satisfaction; but what could a lone girl accomplish against a lot of hoodlums? However, it had been simple, so she said. She had gone down with her two guns, and while the inhabitants of the saloon sought cover she had written the word 'Curs' into the floor with bullets, written so well, in fact, that only a new floor would wipe it out.

"And to think paw bought lickor off Flannigan for years," Susan cried indignantly.

"But didn't Flannigan retaliate?" I asked.

"Huh! Have to give himself away, wouldn't he?" She was scornful.

So here was the explanation of my greeting. I wondered that she had received me at all.

Needless to say, I contrived many another visit to my quaint young friend in the years that followed. I learned all about her life with her adoring father. It had been narrow, but exciting. For the most part, as far as I could judge from what Susan said, as well as from what she did not say, he was the embodiment of easy going selfishness. He had made a drudge of her almost from the moment her mother died, pushing more and more work on to her willing shoulders. Of his past Susan knew little, save that he had had a restless foot which had kept him wandering until it had brought him, in his late fifties, to the ranch. Here he had settled apparently because the hunting and fishing gave outlet to his need of change. The ranch, needless to say, had belonged to Susan's mother.

The ranch holdings were enormous, a small portion only being cultivated; the rest was wild mountain country, with game in plenty. The place would have yielded a fine income had it been halfway tilled, but

the two of them had been satisfied with enough to live on. Susan shared his delight in the wild life. They would drop work at any time to go fishing or to run up a deer, and like a boy she had followed him, taking hard knocks without a murmur.

That he had idled at the Stone Bridge Saloon while Susan worked, I surmised. That much of his enthusiasm for the war was inspired by the bottle, I felt sure; but Susan never blamed him. Rather she regretted pitifully that she had lost so many precious hours in sleep, being too dog tired at sunset mostly to do more than tumble into bed.

That she was free to live her own life now was far from Susan's attitude. The ranch was her sacred inheritance, and she would not hear of selling. She hugged the memory of her preposterous father, brooding tenderly over the heroic ideal he had inspired in her devoted heart. She lost all sense of values in her lonely way of life, and I confess I got out of patience with her. She was only seventeen when I first met her, but capable as could be and quite self-sufficient in ordering her existence. I expostulated with her, telling her she was getting queer, abnormal, but I made no impression on her warped and ignorant mind. I suggested marriage.

"I'd marry a man like paw," she said.

"Well, there are lots of fine young fellows around if you'd give them a chance."

"But paw was a hero," she said, as though that settled the matter.

"There are heroes of peace as well as war," I insisted. "Men who are holding grimly to uncongenial jobs and just as surely sacrificing themselves as though they fought in battle or performed some grand stand stunt." I added the last maliciously.

Susan shrugged her magnificent shoulders with a disdainful glance at me, and I perceived that I would have to give up if I kept her friendship. So she kept on her solitary way, running the ranch with what outside help she needed, scorning the humdrum folk of the town, and feeding her hungry heart on the memories of her dead.

When the war came, I lost track of Susan for several years. I went East to do

what my abilities permitted for my country, and neither of us was given to corresponding. So when in the fall of 1920 I made my way to the ranch once more, I was excited indeed. What had my poor friend done during all this time? She would have found a vocation, I felt sure, hit on some way to follow in her father's footsteps. She might have found her hero as well. She'd have hundreds to choose from. The woods were full of them. Indeed, I discovered one ahead of me—a big husky, by the look of his khaki shoulders. He was striding along, whistling gayly, and I had an impish thought to pick him up and take him to Susan as a present. Anyway, I'd give him a lift, and I drew alongside.

"Have a ride," I invited.

"I sure will. It's hot walking," he replied, and stepped up to the machine.

He was blind!

Before I could recover from my amazement to offer assistance, he reached out, touched the car, and mounted awkwardly, but certainly.

"Great little car," he remarked when we got under way. "We've got one."

"Yep. One of the seven wonders of the world," I answered. "Climbs this grade like a goat. I'm on my way to Susan Maddox's place. Do you know it?"

He laughed softly. "I'll say I do. Are you Mr. Burt? I'm Ben Wylie."

"Why, how did you know?" I asked.

"I've heard my wife tell about you, and you are about the only stranger who would be looking for her."

"Your wife!" I exclaimed. "Did Susan marry you?"

"I'll say so?" he chuckled.

"Well, well! So she got her hero!"

"She got me all right," he laughed. "Came right into the workroom at the hospital, and said, 'I'll take that one,' and I was that one."

I laughed too. "Just like her. Direct action, always."

"You've said it," he agreed, then sobered. "It wasn't funny at the time, though. It was dead serious. I was in terrible shape. Hadn't settled down to being blind. You see, sir, all my life I had lived and worked outdoors. I was

helpless inside. When I enlisted, I never dreamed of being blind. I was willing to take a chance on being killed, though I admit I was scared every time we went over the top, until the excitement got me. When I saw that old whizbang coming, I didn't have any sensations. No time. I just yelled 'Good-by, boys!' and died. Then I came to life again, blind. Well, I wanted to live more than ever, but to be cut off from the life I loved! Well, sir, I'll tell the world it was hell.

"I sure was crazy for a while. I was as full of shell holes as no man's land, but they patched me up and I got well; but I just couldn't face it. I couldn't pull myself together. For a while I just moped. Nobody could do a thing with me. Then I took another tack. I started in to learn things, and worked like mad, but without any hope or interest—just to keep from thinking. Then Susan came."

The lad stopped speaking. I was eager to hear more, but even my curiosity was not bold enough to brave the look on his face, sort of exalted and glowing. I resisted my instincts as long as I could, then I shifted gears with a bang and jerk that brought him out of his absorption, and I dared ask what happened next.

He laughed his low, rich rumble. "Well, one morning, the vocational teacher came into the room where we made reed furniture, with a visitor. I heard them talking softly, then Susan's voice, clear as a bell, said 'I'll take that one.' I thought she meant some finished article on sale; but the teacher said: 'Ben, a young lady would like to speak to you.'

"Susan and I sat on a bench in the yard, and she told me what she wanted. She wanted a soldier on the ranch—sort of brother arrangement—but we would have to marry, on account of talk. She told me about her father and all her crazy notions about heroes—you know them—and some way it didn't sound ridiculous. I was paralyzed at first. Then I saw my chance to get back to the world I loved, and took it. I wasn't man enough even to think of the awful risk she was running. I just thought of escape. We were married in no time, all my affairs arranged,

and on our way the ranch by the three o'clock train. It's funny no one raised any objections. I've wondered about that."

He turned to me suddenly. "What does Susan look like? Is she pretty?"

"Hanged if I know," I answered. "I guess her features could all be picked to pieces, but she's too fascinating for me ever to find out."

"She'll never tell me a thing about her looks, but I sort of decided she must have a way with her that made people step around. It must have been something of the kind that got us on our way so soon."

"Must have reached the ranch about seven if you caught the three," I poked him up a bit.

"Yes. We had a jolly trip, too. Susan was like a young boy. Chuck full of patriotism. Seems she'd got the neighbor girls to help her run the ranch and turned the whole profits over to the Red Cross. Worked like a horse all through the war. I've never dared tell her I only enlisted to save my self-respect. War's a dirty business."

"How did you make out after you got here?" I asked.

"I'm ashamed to say, sir, that I just slumped. It was awful. Susan showed me over the house once and then left me alone. I'd been used to the hospital, where there was some one always about to lend a hand, and I'd never tried to help myself, so I tumbled and knocked around till I was sore all over. Susan merely said I'd soon get used to the place, and of course it was the right way to make me learn to be independent; but I felt just helpless, so I got sulky. I learned the way from my room to the kitchen and porch, but that was all. I wouldn't try. I was damned ugly, I'll tell the world, and I kept that up for three months. I cursed myself for getting marooned on a lonely ranch with this woman, but I didn't have the guts to get out. I was ashamed to go back to the hospital, and I had no other place. Susan was an angel all the time. She tried to interest me in the ranch, to have me walk about with her. She did everything she could, but I just kept up a surly grouch. One day she tried to have me examine her

guns, and I swore at her. I thank God I can never shoot another living thing! You can see, sir, that I was a thoroughgoing skunk."

"Was Susan's hero worship proof against all that?" I asked.

"It was until one hot May day. I was sitting on the porch, and she was busy in the kitchen. All of a sudden there was a crash. For a minute there wasn't a sound, then Susan came out on the porch. She came quietly, but I sensed that she was on the prod.

"So you think you can sit here elegant like, while I work," she snapped. 'Well, you can't. You take this pail of feed out to the chickens and learn that yard. They'll be your job from now on. The chicken yard is to the right of the steps. Go straight ahead and if you fall down, get up and go on.'

"I was mad. I'd been insulted. I grabbed that bucket and started. Of course I fell, but I got up, you bet. I tore around that chicken yard till the hens were squawking red murder. I got bumped on the bean; I got scratched and full of slivers, and finally I took the count over the patent feeder. I sat where I landed for a few minutes and laughed. The ridiculous side of my performance struck me, and I nearly had hysterics.

"I had my laugh out, then I began to think what a fool I had been, not only a fool, but a damned cad. Susan's side of the affair struck me for the first time, and I felt like a cur. I wanted to crawl to her on my hands and knees. Here she had been trying with wonderful patience and devotion to help me get next to myself, and I had acted like an ungrateful idiot. I deserved to have her turn against me, to kick me out for good, but I did want a chance, now I had come to my senses, to prove that I could at least try to be a man. I started to go to her when she burst into the chicken yard and threw herself into my arms. Seems she'd been crying her eyes out in the house over her 'cruelty' to me! The poor dumb-bell! She said she never would have been so cruel if she hadn't been so hot and tired and broken the plates. Would I forgive her? Well, say! When

I felt that girl in my arms I swelled right up. I felt as if I had the world by the tail. I just held her tight, and I told her what was on my mind. I sure gave her an earful.

"We must have been a funny sight, there in the chicken yard, but I tell you, sir, I found peace in that moment. All my troubles seemed to melt away, and I forgot everything except that I was holding my wife in my arms. After that it was jake, I'll tell the world."

"If I remember rightly," I interrupted, "Susan wagged a wicked tongue."

"She sure does," he agreed with a laugh. "She sails into me once in a while, but I get a kick out of it. It bucks me up, for I know she would not do it if she didn't think I was a regular feller, able to look out for myself. I am, too. Why, sir, I feel my blindness is only a handicap. Since that day in the chicken yard I've learned to get about almost independently. I can do nearly everything I did when I could see, thanks to Susan. She keeps saying: 'Ben, I believe you could do this if you tried.' And I find I can, thank God. I work out of doors on the ranch most of the time. Then I have a workshop, where I make brooms and reed furniture. The store in town takes all I have time for that Susan doesn't want. She is making me furnish the whole house. Just now I'm making a cradle."

A cradle! Then Susan had scaled the heights at last! I was prepared for a changed Susan, and I found one—a sublimated Susan, as it were, glorified by love and happiness. I rejoiced to see the perfect sympathy between the two, and my experienced eyes assured me their happiness was secure, founded on the rock of absolute understanding. Come weal, come woe, they would come through serenely, side by side. I thought of my own dear dead, and to hide the lump in my throat I was jocular as I said my good-by. They stood on the porch, his arm about her.

"Well," I said, "you got your hero, Susan."

"Yes," she answered, "I got my hero." And the only regret I had was that he could not see the look in her eyes.



The Way of the Buffalo

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Last Hope Ranch," "Riddle Gawne," "Brass Commandments," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LOVABLE ENEMY.

BALLANTINE physically had responded to treatment, and the wound in his shoulder was healing. His strength, too, was slowly returning, and he was impatient to be up and about. But a psychic malady had gripped him.

His bed had been brought into the big living room, near a window, and he could lean back against the bolstering pillows and look at Ransome, at the new buildings of the Cameron Company, at the clear sweep of sage land southward.

But the world at which he gazed was not the world he knew. It had changed; something had gone out of it. He saw it no longer as a wild, free range where a man could ride unrestrained, unfettered.

A new power had come into the land, a challenging, ruthless power which had denied his right to rule. It had fought him, had broken him, had swept him aside as if he were a negligible element.

Somehow it appeared to him that he could not look upon Cameron as an individual. It had been that way from the first. Cameron's identity did not count. He was a representative of the new power, he was the agent of the new progress, a symbol of something that was to be.

And Cameron seemed to be without a soul. He was an automaton, a cold, unfeeling, human machine. Nothing could stop him. He went ahead, defying trouble, scorning tradition, forging onward ruthlessly.

And yet, in considering Cameron, Ballantine found he did not hate him as he

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should hate him. For Cameron represented an element that Ballantine had always admired. He went ahead. He was brave, he had nerve. He was not to be coerced or intimidated. He was cool under fire.

He had betrayed no nervousness that day on the railroad track. Swiftly, surely, with amazing facility, he had drawn his gun.

Ballantine was still amazed over the occurrence. He had had many fights, and no one had ever before beaten him to the "draw." That he should have been beaten by a young man with a new kind of weapon was almost incredible. And yet, here he was, convalescing from the wound. Proof enough!

The malady which had seized him he could not understand. It was a thing so novel that it almost frightened him. It was a doubt of his infallibility. He, who had never been struck by a bullet, he who had taken a vast pride in his invulnerability, had felt the searing, burning pain of a wound. He felt subdued, a great awe had come to him.

He had met a man mightier than himself! That which could not happen, had happened. He felt strangely humble, calm, considerate. For the first time in his life he knew the pangs of the vanquished.

There came a morning when, as if awakening from a doze, he heard voices on the rear porch just beyond his window. Wide awake in an instant, he listened. The voices were Joe Gibson's and Virginia's.

"So we got Calamity to bring him down the creek a little ways, to the head of the gorge, near the dam," Gibson said. "It was dark, an' we surrounded him. He did not make much fuss, though he wanted to pull that flat gun.

"An' when we wanted to take it away from him he balked. 'If that gun comes out, it comes shootin'!' he told us. Not wantin' to do any shootin', we didn't insist.

"We got him on my horse an' rode down into Pinto Valley. We was figurin' to stop the train an' put him aboard. The way he acted he sort of made me ashamed of myself. He was tellin' me that it was a mighty mean way to ketch a man. Said

if I'd get off my horse he'd jam some words back into my mouth!"

"What words, Gibson?"

"Somethin' I'd said about him an' Miss Fargo. I'd insinuated that he was pretty thick with the girl."

"Oh, Gibson! You shouldn't have said that!"

"I knowed it soon as I'd said it," Gibson admitted. "There ain't nothin' to that. Him an' Miss Fargo ain't got nothin' in common."

"He wanted to fight you because you said there was!" said Virginia. "Oh, I never believed that, Gibson! Cameron is not that kind of a man!"

"Hum," growled Gibson. "I never thought it either. An' I think that if I'd have got off my horse he'd have punched that thought out of my head, if I'd had it. He's square, Jinny."

"Oh, I know it, Gibson! And he would not take the train!"

"Yep; he'd take it. But he'd come right back. Give me a note to his engineer, appointin' me to take his place at a salary of fifty dollars a day. An' me threatenin' to hang him!"

"Gibson—you didn't!" There was horror in Virginia's voice.

"Sure. It didn't feeze him. Said we could hang him an' be damned, otherwise he was comin' back. What was we to do with a guy like that? We was figurin' to bluff him, an' it didn't work.

"You know what that means, Jinny? It means the end of the open range. It means that no matter what we think or do, we're goin' to get civilized. That guy ain't goin' to be denied anything! What he wants he'll take, an' don't you forget it!"

There was a silence. And then Virginia's voice, low, strangely soft.

"Gibson," she inquired, "do you think that—that he will go away—now?"

"Not so's you can notice it!"

"You didn't hurt him, Gibson? Not one bit?"

"Hurt him? Haw, haw, haw! Why, Jinny, all the time we was with him I was scared he'd start somethin', an' that we'd be hurt gettin' out of his way. You see, us pullin' off that bluff without you knowin'

it would sort of got you down on us if we'd have hurt him."

"Gibson," Virginia said, her voice leaping, "you shouldn't have done it. But—but I am—somehow—glad you did. Because—because—it—oh, just because, Gibson."

"Uh-huh," Gibson remarked. "Just because. Sure. Just because." He laughed. "Well, I'll be hittin' the breeze back to camp. So-long!"

There followed a long interval of silence, during which Ballantine lay motionless, listening. No sound came from outside the house except the faint beating of hoofs, indicating that Gibson was riding away.

Ballantine leaned back against the bolstering pillows. He was staring straight ahead when he heard the outside door open and felt Virginia's presence in the room, near the head of his bed.

The girl leaned over and placed a hand lightly on his forehead. He turned his head and smiled up at her.

"That was Gibson, Jinny," he said.

"Yes; Gibson. He rode in to see how you were getting along."

"An' forgot to ask about me, eh?"

"Why!" she exclaimed, startled. "How do you know?"

"I was listenin', Jinny," he answered.

"Yes," he added, as she stepped back, astonished, dismayed, "I heard you an' Gibson talkin'. I heard it all, I expect. That was a fool thing Gibson an' the boys done—tryin' to bluff Cameron. Cameron ain't that kind of a man, Jinny. The boys ought to have knowed that."

"No," Virginia agreed, "he isn't."

"Jinny," he said slowly, "you're goin' over to the enemy's camp."

"Uncle Jeff—" she began protestingly.

"Shucks, you can't fool me, Jinny," he declared gently. "I know. One by one the folks around here will go. Everything's goin'. Everything's changin'. The old days have gone. Things will never be the same again. I'm seein' that now."

"There's a horde of folks sweepin' westward. They're wantin' places to settle. They want land. They want improvements. They'll get them. They'll get everything they want."

"Just like Cameron's goin' to get what he wants. Nothin' can stop them—nothin' can stop Cameron." He paused, searched Virginia's face.

"Jinny," he went on slowly, "what do you think of Cameron?"

Virginia felt it would be futile to evade, and she suddenly knew she no longer wanted to evade. She met Ballantine's gaze steadily.

"I—I thought—at first—that he was impudent and—and presumptuous, and abrupt," she replied. "I thought I didn't like him. And now—"

"And now, Jinny?"

"And now I like him, Uncle Jeff," she answered. "He isn't presumptuous. It's just his way. He knows what he wants, and he takes the most direct way of getting it. And he is brave, Uncle Jeff, and honorable. Why, when Gibson and the other men took him down into Pinto Valley, to make him—"

"I heard Gibson talkin' about that, Jinny. An' I've been sort of expectin' that you'd begin to think—what you're thinkin' now." He smiled. "I ain't blamin' you none," he added. "An' if he hadn't beat me like he did—with that new gun of his—I expect mebber—"

She was on her knees beside him, stroking his forehead. Her cheeks were flaming, and she laid her face against his so that he might not see.

"Uncle Jeff," she said softly, "you like him! You like him—too!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SALVE FOR THE SPIRIT.

BALLANTINE had heard the worst—that the people of Ransome knew Cameron's bullet had struck him. They knew now that he was not infallible, that the charm which had shielded him for many years had been broken. He heard the news while convalescing; when he had taken to sitting out in the yard, on a bench under a giant cottonwood, where he could watch the Cameron workings.

Calamity, it was said, had disseminated the news. He had been on one of the flat

cars on the morning of the shooting, and he declared he had seen dust fly from Ballantine's shirt when the bullet struck.

He had called attention to a thing which everybody who had witnessed the shooting had seen—that Ballantine had been too deliberate in restoring his half drawn gun to its holster after Cameron's shot. To clinch his argument he reminded Ransome that Ballantine had not been seen outside the house in six weeks.

Ransome believed Calamity.

Ballantine felt the disgrace of his position. He said nothing to Virginia, but mentally he declared that never again would he show his face in Ransome.

Ballantine was thinner, he seemed paler, his figure lacked its former erectness. There were deeper lines about his eyes, which had lost their keenness. They appeared now to hold an expression of impotent resentment, a furtive glint of shame.

He had aged much, his step had lost its elasticity, his shoulders had a dejected droop. Moreover, he no longer wore his gun. He had left it in the house on a peg in the wall of the living room, and Virginia had observed that Ballantine no longer even looked at it. His spirit seemed broken; he apparently had no interest in anything except the progress of Cameron's work.

But he never said anything to Virginia about the work. Day after day he sat on the bench under the cottonwood staring across the white picket fence at the men working about the new buildings.

He avoided people from Ransome. Occasionally a townsman, curious, would approach the picket fence, and at such times Ballantine would get up and go into the house. Virginia once heard him say that he didn't want any of "them damned meddlers pokin' their noses around."

But on a morning about two months after the shooting, he was sitting on the bench under the cottonwood watching Cameron, who was walking down the railroad track talking with Dell, his engineer. So intent and interested in Cameron's movements was Ballantine that he did not hear the gate open and did not see Calamity moving down the walk toward him.

He became aware of Calamity when the

latter's shadow appeared before him. He looked up, to see Calamity standing within three feet of him.

Escape was impossible, and Ballantine's eyes flashed with resentment.

"Calamity," he said sharply, "what in the devil do you want here?"

"I was just moochin' around, Sunset," returned Calamity. "Just moochin' around. I seen you settin' here. You looked lonesome—sort of. I thought I'd just come over an' set with you—if you don't mind. My brother's took ag'in."

Ballantine's eyes gleamed with a grim humor.

"What took him, this time, Calamity?"

"He had some kind of a fit. Epileptic—or somethin'. His folks come home an' found him."

"He get it from buttin' into other folks' business?" Ballantine shot a sullen glance at Calamity.

Calamity reddened.

"Meanin' to refer to me, I reckon," he said. "About that shootin'. Well, I reckon I didn't mean nothin', Sunset. Most everybody in town seen it. But most of them seen it without knowin' what was happenin'. They wasn't none of them, exceptin' me, seen the dust fly from your shirt when Cameron's bullet struck. But I thought they'd seen it, an' I reckoned it was a thing a man could talk about."

Ballantine was silent. Glancing sidewise at him, Calamity thought Ballantine didn't appear to be exactly angry. His eyes had a hurt expression, and Calamity's sympathy was aroused. This seeing Ballantine with a hurt looked in his eyes was a new thing. It was astonishing, amazing.

"Well," said Calamity, "there's been more talk. I've been hearin' it. This time it's the Cameron who's doin' it."

"What's Cameron been sayin'?"

"Well, just sort of tryin' to make a fool of me. Here I been tellin' that Cameron beat you to the draw on a fair chance. An' I reckon it was. But now along comes Cameron a-tellin' folks that it wasn't no fair chance at all. He's tellin' folks that he took an unfair advantage of you. An' I'm wantin' to get it straight. I ain't goin' to stand for nobody ruinin' my reputation!"

"What's Cameron sayin'?" asked Ballantine. There was a new look in his eyes—eagerness, hope.

"Well, I reckon it don't amount to a hoot of a lot," Calamity replied. "It's just that some of the boys has been complimentin' Cameron on bein' able to beat you to the draw. He's a queer cuss. Seems he don't like to be complimented none.

"Anyway, he says that before he come here he'd been warned about your draw by his granddad, Smoke Cameron. He's sayin' that just before you pull your gun you spread the fingers of your left hand, or somethin'. He says he watched your fingers, an' when he seen them begin to spread he flashed his gun.

"Ballantine, I reckon he's just a darned liar—ain't he?"

Ballantine said nothing. His eyes were gleaming brightly. He got up and walked rapidly to the house. Calamity, wondering, followed closely.

Ballantine entered the kitchen door, passing Virginia, who was working at a table near a stove. The girl caught a glimpse of Ballantine's face as he walked through the kitchen.

She caught her breath with astonishment and moved quickly to the door between the kitchen and the living room, where she stood, her eyes wide and inquiring, watching him.

For Ballantine had reached up to the gun and cartridge belt which hung from a peg on the wall. He pulled belt and weapon down, strapped the belt around his waist, shoved the leather holster into position and stood erect, facing the kitchen door.

Virginia was still watching, but she turned her head at a sound and saw Calamity standing behind her, peering over her shoulder at Ballantine.

Ballantine's face was alight with a strange joy, his eyes had something of the old, indomitable gleam in them. He stood erect, his feet together, like a soldier. His shoulders were thrown back, his head was high.

While Virginia and Calamity watched him he let his shoulders come forward a little and dropped his hands to his sides. Calamity, who had witnessed the shooting of Bill Nelson on the porch of the City

Hotel, was aware that the old man had assumed the position he always took when meditating the drawing of the gun at his hip.

Virginia, too, realized what was happening, and she stood rigid, wondering what impended. She saw Ballantine stiffen. His right hand moved upward slightly. The left, hanging at his side, was rigid.

Watching it, Virginia saw the fingers begin to spread. Dismayed, apprehensive, for she thought Ballantine was about to kill Calamity, she stepped in front of the visitor, crying:

"Don't! Uncle Jeff! What on earth is the matter with you?"

To Virginia's vast astonishment, Ballantine laughed. His eyes were as they had been in the old days—bright, keen, unwavering, although now they held a confidence which had not been in them for many days.

"He spotted that fault, eh?" he observed. "Smoke spotted it! An' I never noticed it! I never knowed it! An' Cameron knowed it!"

He paused, and awe came into his eyes and into his voice as he again spoke:

"An' he's tellin' everybody about it—about how he pulled his gun before I went for mine! He's tellin' about it, eh? Well, the darned cuss!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WHITE DEATH.

AS a dog watches the movements of its master, so Ballantine watched Cameron as the latter, each day, moved about among the buildings on the other side of the white picket fence.

Ballantine continued to sit under the cottonwood tree. He sometimes went as far as the fence, but never beyond it. He never missed watching Cameron when in the morning the younger man rode down the slope from town.

He could have told any one where, at any time of the day, Cameron might be found. There was dumb worship in the old eyes that followed Cameron wherever he went, there was a mute eagerness, a yearning to be near Cameron.

But he couldn't bring himself to go to Cameron to thank him for what he had done; he couldn't even send word. To do so would have hurt his pride. But he could watch Cameron, and admire him from afar.

For since Cameron had frankly told the people of Ransome that he had taken an unfair advantage in the shooting, Ballantine had invested Cameron with a personality. No longer was Cameron an unfeeling machine, an agent of a ruthless and heartless force which had come into the West to crush those who opposed him. Cameron, he felt, had a soul.

The season was spent; the wind carried a chill. The round-up had been completed, and for the first time in his life—since he had been able to ride a horse—Ballantine had not participated. He had left all the work to Gibson and the men. He hadn't felt "up to it," he told Virginia; he was a "little tired in his legs."

His real reason for not going to the round-up had been that he wished to be near Cameron. He began to feel, now that the buildings were nearing completion, that Cameron meant to leave Ransome. He feared that. He didn't want Cameron to leave. He knew how Virginia felt about Cameron; he knew how he, himself, felt.

He came to the door on a morning during the latter days of October, and smiled guiltily at Virginia in the kitchen. He was booted; he wore a heavy coat, lined with sheep skin, and he had the collar turned up around his neck. A heavy cap with a broken peak was pulled down over his forehead, billowing the long, white hair. He was pulling on a pair of faded mittens. There was defiant embarrassment in his eyes.

"Uncle Jeff, you are not going out under that tree this morning?" Virginia said, frowning.

"Shucks," he replied, grinning. "I ain't no yearlin' no more, Jinny!"

"Uncle Jeff," she charged, "I believe you go out there to watch Cameron!"

"Well, mebbe," he conceded. "I've been thinkin' that some of these days I'll ketch his eye an' wave to him. An' then mebbe he'll come over an' I can thank him for what he done for me."

"He'll never come here again, Uncle Jeff," said Virginia, positively. "Twice I've ordered him away. You tried to shoot him. Gibson and the other men were mean to him." She shook her head. "He'll never come here again."

"Shucks! You don't know anything about men, Jinny! He'll come—if he sees he's wanted. I expect we've both been a heap stubborn, an' we don't deserve to have him come."

Virginia turned her head. Ballantine watched her for an instant, then abruptly opened the door and went out.

He stepped into a cold, raw wind that whined down out of the north. He buttoned his coat against it and made his way to the cottonwood where he had passed many days.

He stood for a time, bracing his body against the wind while he gazed toward the buildings of the Cameron property. There was no one to be seen, although there was smoke coming out of the chimneys of some of the buildings, and Cameron's horse was hitched to the railing in front of the office.

Ballantine turned and stared northward. The wind almost sucked his breath out of his lungs. He squinted against the cold, penetrating blasts, and saw a cloud bank that stretched along the northern horizon from east to west.

He knew what it portended. The weather had never fooled him yet. A norther was coming. Sure it was early for such a storm, but it had been his experience that nobody had as yet been able to hold a storm back. They came when they came, and that was all there was to it. People had to get ready for them.

He wondered if Gibson was ready. Sure. Gibson was wise. Gibson would have the herd sheltered so the cattle wouldn't drift. In the spring there'd be mighty few cattle missing.

Right now he could see Gibson watching the sky, squinting at it with those keen eyes of his, his lips parted, showing the big teeth. Gibson was queer, but there wasn't a foreman in the country more reliable.

The wind searched Ballantine; he shivered. He stood under the tree, hunching

his shoulders so that the collar of his coat covered his chin. And then he suddenly raised his head.

Cameron had come out of the door of the office, stood for an instant gazing northward, then descended the steps and mounted his horse. That glance northward told Ballantine that Cameron had noticed the cloud bank. Cameron would go to Ransome.

But Cameron did not head White Star toward Ransome. Ballantine was mildly astonished to see the black horse move southward.

Well, that was all right. Cameron was probably going to make a round of the buildings before the storm broke. He'd want to see that everything was in shape. But Cameron was bundled up pretty well for so short a trip. He had on a heavy coat, cap, gloves.

He watched the black horse until it went out of sight behind a building down near the head of the gorge. That, he supposed, would be the limit of Cameron's trip. He'd be back soon.

Ballantine had begun to feel the cold. He moved back toward the house and halted near the rear porch. He stiffened when he saw the black horse again. This time the animal was well south of the last building, loping southward toward the open country.

Ballantine's apprehension was instant. What a fool thing for Cameron to do! Didn't he know that the storm wasn't more than half an hour away! No man who knew anything about storms would ride away from home with one impending. Chances were that he'd never get back if he did!

Cameron certainly ought to know better. But apparently Cameron didn't know better, for he kept riding southward, the horse loping steadily.

Ballantine's apprehension grew. Cameron had ridden several times in that direction, and there wasn't any doubt that he'd be able to find the trail back in decent weather. But that was it—this wouldn't be decent weather.

There'd be hell out there within the next half hour or so! There wouldn't be any

trail. Cameron would never find his way back.

Ballantine felt a wave of anger surging through him. He had never thought that Cameron would be such an imbecile. The anger was succeeded by dismay, by anxiety that screwed Ballantine's face up so that deep lines showed in it.

Cameron kept on going. He was vanishing from sight as Ballantine watched him. Horse and rider had dwindled to the proportions of a mere dot in Ballantine's vision.

Ballantine glanced at the kitchen door—at the windows. He didn't see Virginia, but suddenly he wondered what Virginia would say if she knew that he had stood there like a fool watching Cameron ride away without his trying to stop him.

He glanced northward again, and several hard, flinty particles of snow stung his cheeks. He could see that the black cloud had changed its appearance. There were still shades of black in it—far away.

But the prevailing color was a milky gray, which appeared to be seething with violent motion. There were long white streamers stretching out before it, filmy wisps, like gigantic tongues, that seemed to reach down as if trying to lick the earth.

Ballantine moved toward the stable. He glanced back as he went, as though fearful that Virginia would see him. But he did not see her face at any of the windows, and when he got the garden house between him and the stable he began to run toward the latter structure. He was hoping he would have time, before the storm struck, to catch Cameron and bring him back.

He went into the stable, threw saddle and bridle upon the piebald horse, caught up an extra blanket and strapped it into the slicker. Then he led the horse outside, swung into the saddle and headed southward.

He reached the crest of the first hill southward, and there halted the horse for an instant to stare after Cameron. Cameron was no longer visible. Flurries of snow, fine, like dust, were swirling between him and the point where he had last seen Cameron. The flurries shut off his view. But he knew about where Cameron had

been riding, and he gave the piebald the word.

Fifteen minutes later a smother of white enveloped him. It struck him with terrific fury, with such force that he was almost blown out of the saddle. He held onto the pommel for a time, until the first vicious blast had spent itself. Then he rode on, bracing his body against the mighty pressure behind him.

He wished, now, that he had put on heavier clothing. He wasn't as tough as he had been; he didn't have the resistance; he felt the cold more. The wind seemed to go right through his clothing; it chilled him to the bone, almost.

He halted the horse and unstrapped the blanket. Sitting in the saddle he tried to swing the blanket around to cover his shoulders. The wind whipped it out of his grasp. He clutched at it, but saw it go swirling away, to disappear, like a monstrous bird, into the smother of white ahead of him.

He guessed he'd have to do without the blanket. It wouldn't have been much good, anyway; the wind would have got under it and made it bothersome to hold.

He spurred the horse forward. The earth was still bare in spots, although it wouldn't have made any difference to him anyway. He knew every foot of the country, and he'd get back without any trouble.

Anyway, he wasn't worried about himself; his thoughts were all about Cameron. He felt certain that he wouldn't have to ride far before he'd see Cameron returning. Cameron certainly wouldn't keep going south after the storm had struck; he'd be making tracks back as fast as he could.

And Cameron would have to take the trail he himself was riding, for the simple reason that there wasn't another. Cameron's horse would keep to the level places; he never knew a horse which would wear himself out crossing a rough section when there were levels where the going would be easier.

For an hour he rode straight ahead. He was shivering; the wind behind him had grown icy, bitter. It was full of fine snow, like meal, which rattled against him, sifted down the collar of his coat and stung the sides of his face.

He rode on. Half an hour later, after climbing an upland, he halted the horse and tried to peer ahead, into a seething white world. He couldn't see ten feet beyond the muzzle of the horse he rode.

He began to believe that in some way he had missed Cameron. But he couldn't understand how that could be, unless Cameron's horse, not being familiar with the country, had strayed off the trail, or unless Cameron was still going southward.

He didn't think Cameron would be that foolish! He had been foolish to set out at all, but he wouldn't be foolish enough to keep on going after the storm had struck.

He rode on again, a little distance. Again he halted the horse. The animal stood with braced legs, his back to the wind, his head down.

The wind behind Ballantine seemed to be gaining strength. It blew steadily, and the flintlike snow particles drove against him in horizontal lines. It was not the first time he had been out in storms of this type, so he was not much impressed by the knowledge that the snow was already in deep drifts around him.

He could still see bare places, even though they were near, and he knew that the ridges would always be exposed. A wind like this would keep the ridges bare.

What bothered him most was that he seemed to have missed Cameron, and that he felt the cold so much. He had lost much blood after the shooting, and he supposed he hadn't much left in him.

That must be the explanation. For a long time he had wanted to draw his hands out of the mittens and blow his breath on them in order to warm them, but he had successfully resisted the impulse until now—until he had been able to satisfy himself that he wouldn't do it merely to humor himself.

His breath didn't seem to warm his hands, so he beat them together, and upon his thighs, which were covered with snow. They were still numb when he restored the mittens. His feet were leaden. He felt that the cold was more intense than he had thought. So he dismounted, looped the reins around an arm and began to walk forward, beside the horse.

He walked until his breathing became

labored. His feet felt more alive; there were twinges of pain in them. But his hands didn't feel so good, and he took to beating them again, swinging them wide and striking his body under the armpits—the right hand to the left, and the left to the right.

He wished he hadn't lost the blanket. But there was no use wasting any thought upon it. It was gone, and he'd have to do without it.

There was no diminution in the strength of the wind. As a matter of fact, it seemed to be blowing harder. "Straight from the North Pole, I expect," he mused, "where they keep 'em on ice."

He felt he ought to go back. He'd traveled several miles, and facing the wind on the return trip would be a bigger job than riding with it. But he couldn't go back without knowing that Cameron was all right.

And then he thought of the river, remembering that at this season of the year there was never much water, and that the sand of the river bed would make good traveling. Maybe Cameron, seeing the storm coming, had returned by way of the river.

Sure; that was it. Funny he hadn't thought of that before. That explained why he hadn't met Cameron. But maybe that wasn't the explanation. He couldn't afford to take any chances. The snow was coming in such a blinding, dazzling smother that he felt Cameron might have passed within half a dozen yards of him and he not know it.

Indecision possessed him. He rode west a little distance, trying to peer ahead of him into the curtain of snow. When the horse began to stumble over some uneven ground he knew he had got off the trail; so he wheeled the animal around and sent him eastward.

He got off the horse again. He admitted that he felt a little dizzy, and he was aware that he was staggering a trifle. But he remedied the latter by hanging onto the pommel of the saddle and resting himself against the horse. He began to feel that he was losing his sense of direction, and for an instant after pulling the horse to a halt he stood staring about uncertainly. But he couldn't see anything but snow.

He'd never seen anything like it! It

seemed to him that there was a malicious persistence in the way it kept driving into his face. Not a let-up for an instant. No respite from the terrific fury of the wind. The cold seemed more intense. He saw braids of frost hanging from the muzzle of the horse, from its mane.

The wind rushed past him with such force that it took his breath. A sudden unreasoning rage seized him, and he mounted, stood up in the stirrups and shook a fist at the driving, fleecy mist that surrounded him.

"Damn you!" he yelled. "Ain't you never goin' to quit?"

The wind drove the words back into his mouth, and he choked over them.

Abruptly, he spurred the horse and sent him headlong into a gully. Derisive, defiant, he sat in the saddle, his face turned from the wind, and watched the snow swirl above his head.

Somehow, it seemed warmer in the gully. But he knew better than that. The strange warmth he felt, the lassitude which was stealing over him, was caused by the cold.

The cold was a thief, a liar. He stole upon one, lulled one into a feeling of false comfort. And then before you knew it, it had struck a foul blow at your heart.

He couldn't be fooled that way.

He urged the horse out of the gully and headed it eastward. Likely Cameron would be over that way—near the river. The snow, hurled against his face like meal from a giant sifter, stung him to a fury. But he had to endure it if he wanted to find Cameron, and so he doggedly rode on, wisely letting the horse have its head.

The horse went on for half an hour. Ballantine made no attempt to guide it. Sometimes the animal headed into the teeth of the wind; at other times it sheered off and the flintlike snow stung Ballantine's left cheek. By that sign he knew they were going eastward. And that was where they wanted to go, just now—eastward. If they were to find Cameron anywhere, they'd find him near the river.

But the river seemed far away. For a time Ballantine was in a fever of impatience. Then, after a while, he grew strangely contented. It didn't seem so cold, after all.

He lifted his head and tried to stare into the north. The snow no longer stung his face, although the wind brought a film over his eyes, blinding him.

Down in a valley he brought the horse to a halt. He was getting too warm. He knew he was in a valley by the way the snow had drifted. It was as high as his stirrups, in places. Farther along, where, gazing downward, he saw a patch of earth, he slid out of the saddle.

When he struck the earth his legs doubled under him and he went to his knees. The reins were jerked from his hands. He got to his feet and grasped at them, but the horse had turned his head and the reins escaped him.

He lurched against the horse, caught hold of the pommel, tried to speak, to urge the animal on. No sound came from his lips.

"Hadh't ought to have bucked ag'in' the wind that way," was his thought. "Serves me right. No man can get fresh with a norther."

But he hadn't found Cameron. He brought a hand around and slapped the shoulder of the horse. The animal leaped forward, brushed against him and knocked him face down, into a big drift.

He turned over upon his back and relaxed. Soft, it was—downy. Lordy! He was tired. He'd like to rest here for a couple of hours. He would, only he had to find Cameron!

He clambered out of the drift and stared around for the horse. The horse had disappeared; the snow had swallowed him.

For an instant he was near to panic, and he made several dashes into the drifts around him in an attempt to find the horse. Then he stood, his arms dangling at his sides, his shoulders drooping, his head on his chest.

After a little he began to walk. He kept the wind at his left, so that he'd be sure he was going eastward. But he had trouble in keeping his feet under him. A half a dozen times in half a mile he fell. And each time he went down the effort to rise was greater. He didn't want to get up, but he had to find Cameron. Virginia wanted Cameron!

There came a time when it seemed to him

10 A

that all motion had ceased. He stood, somewhere in the great white waste of world, his knees sagging, his eyes closed, listening.

There was no sound. He felt no pain, no emotion. He couldn't stand any longer, and so he sat down in a drift.

It was so soft and fleecy and so comfortable that he sank backward into it and sighed contentedly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HIS LAST STAND.

NOT until the storm broke did Virginia feel any concern for Ballantine. When the first blast of snow struck the ranch house she went to the kitchen door, stepped out upon the porch and called to him.

The wind drowned her voice, and a smother of white hid the front yard from view. She reëntered the house, threw a cloak over her shoulders and ran to the cottonwood where, during the days of his convalescence, Ballantine had passed much of his time.

Not seeing him there she returned to the rear porch and stood there for an instant, calling. When Ballantine did not reply she ran to the stable. The stable door was open, the piebald horse gone.

She stood for a few moments in the stable door, trying to peer through the veils of snow which had dropped between her and the horizons. She felt that Ballantine had not gone far. To Ransome, perhaps. Or he might have gone to the office of the Cameron Company.

For Virginia had observed Ballantine's eagerness; she knew that he wanted to make peace with Cameron, she had known how he had watched Cameron's movements, she had seen the yearning expression in his eyes. She knew he was too experienced to attempt to ride far with a storm coming on.

Her fears allayed, she returned to the house. But she could not work. Many times during the half hour which followed she went to the front windows and tried to peer through the snow toward Ransome.

The house had grown suddenly cold; the windows were frosting. So she stirred the fire in the kitchen stove and lighted the log

fire in the grate in the big living room. Returning to the kitchen, she stood at a window, staring out, watching the ground turn white, observing how quickly the storm was changing the appearance of the landscape.

She was still at the window when she saw a blot appear in the wall of white westward. She watched it coming slowly toward her.

The blot developed into a horse and rider, and she drew a breath of thankfulness. Then the horse halted at the stable. A man dismounted.

With a cry of mingled dismay and gladness she opened the kitchen door, ran with her skirts flapping wildly in the wind, to the stable door—to see Gibson standing just inside, beating his big felt hat against his boots to knock the snow from it.

"Gibson!" she cried. "Where is Uncle Jeff?"

"Ain't he here?" demanded Gibson. His lips closed over his teeth.

She shook her head, words failing her.

"Look here now!" he said gruffly. "What's up? Get a good hold on yourself, Jinny! Where's Ballantine?"

"Why, he's gone, Gibson! Can't you see? The piebald horse isn't here! Uncle Jeff has ridden him—somewhere!"

"H-m!" Gibson grinned. "Gone to town, most likely. Nothin' to be worried about, I reckon. You go right back into the house. I'll ride over to town an' get him. I reckon he ain't so strong lately. First time he ever missed a round-up. She's sure a ripper, ain't she?"

Gibson brought his horse out of the stable, mounted and rode toward Ransome.

Virginia went into the house.

When half an hour later Gibson returned, alone, Virginia stood in the kitchen door, her hands pressed over her bosom, her heart filled with dire forebodings.

Gibson's face was long as he stepped in and closed the door behind him.

"He ain't in town," he said. "He ain't been there."

"Oh, Gibson!"

"Shucks, Jinny, don't go to worryin' now. There ain't nothin' in that. He ain't gone far."

Gibson stood, trying to conceal his anxiety. Then he turned to the door.

"I reckon I'll go look for him," he said.

He was out of the door before Virginia could stop him. She stood in the doorway after he reached the stable and saw him mount his horse and ride southward.

An instant after he left the stable door he had vanished. And Virginia stood in the doorway staring with wide, frightened eyes at the spot where he had disappeared.

Two hours later, as she sat in a chair beside the kitchen table, her hands spread out on its top while she stared blankly at the wall, she heard a sound outside, as of some one stepping upon the porch. She got up and ran to the door, thinking that Gibson had returned.

But when she threw the door open she saw Cameron standing on the porch. In his arms, cuddled close, wrapped in a blanket, was a slim figure that she instantly recognized.

Strangely, although her heart leaped in dismay, she did not scream or faint. Her face as white as the snow that covered the blanket which was wrapped around Ballantine, her eyes big, frightened, but wondrously steady, she silently stepped back to permit Cameron to enter with his burden.

There was no word spoken by either as he followed her through the kitchen into the living room. Cameron placed the blanketed figure on the bed, unwound the blanket and stepped back.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Virginia, then.

Ballantine seemed rigid. His face was dead white, his eyes half closed. He was breathing, for Virginia could perceive the slow, regular movement of his chest. But his lips were blue and the billowy white hair of his head was shot through with sparkling, glistening beads of frost.

She turned to look at Cameron, but he was outside. He came in presently, carrying a pan of snow. Virginia sprang to help him as he bent over Ballantine. Together they worked, saying nothing. While they bent over Ballantine, Gibson came in. After a quick, startled glance at Ballantine's face Gibson said shortly:

"I'll go get Doc Mills."

The door had closed behind Gibson when Ballantine raised himself on an elbow and stared with wondering eyes at the two faces

near him. He raised his free hand and passed it over his forehead. He smiled wanly, in evident perplexity.

"Seems I done it, after all," he said through his stiffened lips.

"Did what, Uncle Jeff?" Virginia asked gently.

"Why, I brought Cameron in, of course!" he answered. "That's what I went out for, wasn't it—to bring him in? I seen him goin', from the office. An' I knowed he'd never make it. Seems to me— Well, things is jumbled, sort of."

He stared straight at Cameron, and the latter perceived that his mind was wandering, although seeking to grasp at something tangible by which he would be enabled to center his thoughts definitely.

"Where did I find you, Cameron?" he asked. "Along the river trail somewheres, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Cameron replied, "along the river trail."

Ballantine sighed, smiled, and sank to the pillow.

"That sort of squares things between us, then," he said. "Yes, sir; it sort of squares things, for you tellin' folks that about me spreadin' my fingers. Why, yes, Jinny! The darned—cuss! He done it! An' don't you worry none. He'll be back! Sure! You don't know anything about men! If a man likes a girl he'll sure hang around her!"

Ballantine was talking to himself. It was as if there was no one to hear him. And perhaps Virginia and Cameron did not listen. For Virginia was looking at Cameron. Her eyes were very bright, and now once more Cameron observed the miracle of the crimson stain which stole up the column of her throat and vanished into her hair.

"He went—for—for—you?" she murmured.

"For me, Virginia. All the time I was carrying him here he kept talking about saving me. He had ridden after me, thinking I would never be able to get back. I found him lying in a drift, near the river. He had lost his horse. He—"

"Jinny," interrupted Ballantine, "we've both been a heap stubborn. We don't deserve to have him come!"

"We've all been stubborn, I think," said Cameron. "We've been fighting when we should have been—"

"Jinny," again interrupted Ballantine, "you like him—too! That's what you said to me!" He was now looking straight at Virginia. His eyes were clear, sane. "I've brought him here," he added, although in his eyes now there was a glint of doubt; "I've brought him here, an' if you don't hang onto him you don't love him like you ought to!"

Cameron stepped close to Virginia, placed his hands upon her shoulders. A crimson tide again surged into her face, but she raised her head and looked into his eyes, her own unwavering.

An instant later she was in his arms. Her head was against his shoulder, and he was holding her tightly, silently while both listened again to Ballantine's voice:

"Leave the fightin' to fools! The darned—cuss! He went around tellin' about it! But I'll get him for you, Jinny!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THEIR SUN HAD SET.

HAD Ballantine heard the doctor say he was going to die, or had he dreamed it? He didn't know. But it made no difference, anyway. He didn't care.

He seemed to hear the voices of many people. The voices came in the window beside his bed along with a warm, soft breeze. He knew the snow had gone. Ironically, the skies smiled, the breeze seemed to whisper mockingly.

He didn't know how many days had passed since he had brought Cameron home. They hadn't told him the truth, and he still believed he had rescued Cameron.

Not that it made any difference about days. He had seen so many of them pass that he had lost track of them. And what difference did it make? A few more or a few less?

What disturbed him was that he seemed to have once before lain in his bed at this window, listening to voices. Once he had overheard Gibson and Virginia talking

about Cameron. This situation was similar, although there was this difference—that other time he had overheard talk about Cameron, now he was overhearing talk about himself.

He wasn't very interested. He knew Virginia was sitting beside his bed, although she appeared far away and he saw her only faintly. She'd been there for ages, he thought. And he had seen Cameron there, too, many times. He had often wished they wouldn't look so downhearted.

But he followed the talk; he found some of it amusing.

"Dr. Mills says it wasn't the wound. It's exhaustion, and his heart. It's been going back on him for a long time."

Ballantine heard that. He smiled. Just as if he hadn't known it!

"Game old rooster. The best of the type that used to run this country. Sorry to see him go."

Ballantine heard that. It puzzled him just a little. Who was going—and where?

"Trouble always gets 'em!" declared another voice. "If they hang around long enough trouble will sneak up behind 'em an' bat 'em on the head when they ain't lookin'. Take my brother-in-law, Jim Carter. Always boastin' that nothin' ever happened to him. Well, what did happen? Got both his legs cut off by a dinky engine."

Ballantine heard that. He laughed aloud. Calamity was—well, Calamity. That was all—just Calamity. He'd never change.

For a time Ballantine did not hear anything more. He lay, with his eyes half closed, reviewing pictures. He was seeing the country as he had known it many years ago. Wild it had been then. And worth living in.

He was seeing himself as a youth. He was looking at his father, at the old men of the T Down outfit. They were a hard set. Gunfighters. Drifters. Hardy, honest riders. Rustlers. Gamblers. Indians. Deer. Wolves and bear and elk and buffalo.

They all passed before his vision—a mighty panorama. They vanished. All gone. Nothing left but coyotes, snakes and—and civilization.

Not that he condemned civilization. It

had to come, just as all the things he had witnessed had to go. All was preordained, necessary to the scheme of things.

He heard the voices again.

"He never sleeps. Go around him any time—day or night—and you'll find him lookin' at you. Never saw a man like him!"

Ballantine heard that. Were they talking of him? If they were they were fooling themselves. He slept, like every one else. The difference was that he was a light sleeper. Of a night he'd heard every noise, no matter how slight. He'd be wide awake in an instant. He'd been trained that way from sleeping in the open, amid danger.

Folks who slept in beds all their lives didn't need to hear every noise, every movement. But a man sleeping out on the plains had to hear them. But he was sleepy now. He wished the folks would go away and let him rest.

"The doc says it won't be long," said another voice. "Shucks, that's too bad. I was hopin'—"

Ballantine heard that.

A few minutes later he heard another voice. It was faint and far.

"So Miss Fargo an' Baxter is goin' to get married soon? Well, I sort of expected it. Well, that's a whoopin' big weddin' present. But Cameron does things that way."

Ballantine heard that.

A few minutes later Virginia emerged from the kitchen door and stood on the porch gazing with brimming eyes at the many citizens of Ransome who for hours had been grouped around the porch, waiting. Dr. Mills stood behind her, staring downward.

A silence greeted Virginia; the voices were stilled.

She smiled mournfully at the upturned faces.

"He's asleep!" she whispered.

Ballantine did not hear that.

Virginia stood, her hands hanging limply at her sides as the people of Ransome, singly, and in twos and threes, moved toward the gate in the white picket fence. The last to go was Dr. Mills. He said lowly: "I'll send—" He mentioned a name. Virginia shuddered, covered her face with her hands.

And then Mills was gone and Virginia looked at Cameron, who all the time had been standing at the rear of the porch, staring westward. Virginia moved toward him. He turned when he heard her coming, and held his arms open for her.

She ran to him, sobbing; and he stood, whispering to her and patting her head, while he watched the sun go down. Twilight came, and the two still stood there.

A gray, silvery light in the west touched the peaks of some distant mountains. The

light flooded the land—an effulgent glow which still held some of the fading colors of the sunset.

Ballantine's land! The land of his youth! He would ride there no more. The sun had set for him—for him and his kind.

Never more would he come riding out of the West—he and his hardy, bronzed men, with their picturesque garb, their quaint language and their simple rules of honesty and fair dealing.

Their sun had set.

THE END



SERVED HER RIGHT

SHE liked him—yes, upon her word!

She let him fetch and carry;

But, oh, his suit was too absurd—

He'd never do to marry!

The swain departed, stern and black.

She wept—how could she flaunt him?

The luckless man came flying back;

Straightway she did not want him.

And so she wavered back and forth.

She met his love with banter,

And when he left her, hurt and wroth,

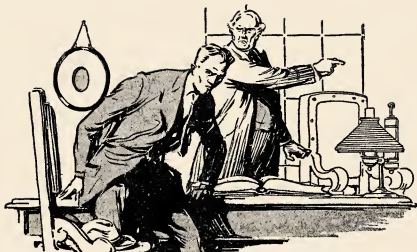
She called him back instant;

Until a maid who knew her mind,

Whose words were gently spoken,

Stepped in, when she had been unkind—

And then her heart was broken!



The Resignation of David Strongman

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

TWO events took Tiverton by the ears: the mysterious disappearance of Jeremy Delton, vice president of the Tiverton National, and the resignation of Judge Strongman from the criminal court bench after many years of impeccable service.

Banker Delton was a man of marked, methodical habits. He lived in comfortable bachelor quarters at the Brayton Arms; he was a man of strong literary tastes, and ascetic in habit. During the ten years through which he had been associated with the Tiverton National no scandalous breath had sullied his name. In fact, the entire population of Tiverton set him down for an arduous worker, a student, and a bit of

a recluse. Hence, when on that momentous Thursday, Delton did not appear with his usual punctuality at the bank, a confrère called at the Brayton Arms. He learned shortly that the banker had not returned to his rooms the previous evening. Nor had he been seen since he left, the day before at eight thirty, for the Tiverton National.

Now three days had elapsed, with no trace of the missing banker. Sub rosa, certain officials caused his accounts to be examined; but they were absolutely straight. Moreover, Delton had invested in the Tiverton National a handsome fortune, which remained intact. No motive could be ascribed to his sudden, mysterious

disappearance. After the third day the whisper of foul play strengthened into audible words. The Tiverton National directors met in executive session. They voted unanimously to set in motion competent investigation.

On the fourth day Tiverton received its second shock. Judge Strongman, a man still in his prime, a brilliant jurist, and a known enthusiast in all matters judicial, suddenly resigned from the bench. He gave as his reason his desire for rest and study apart from the routine of litigation. Yet the judge was seemingly a splendid specimen of virile efficiency. And he was not yet sixty. Moreover, there was little about his physique which seemed to require a rest. To be sure, Abraham Tolliver, the district attorney, and Strongman's most intimate friend, had secretly noted a slight pallor in Strongman's usually ruddy countenance; faint purple shadows under the iron gray eyes. But Tolliver, loyal friend that he was, held his counsel—and pondered. What did it mean? What could it mean? For only a week before, his old friend had told him with every sign of sincerity that he would sit on the criminal bench until he was retired. And now in a week Strongman had voluntarily withdrawn!

Tolliver wondered if some sudden insidious malady had shaken that brilliant mind. From long years of association with Strongman, he knew that the judge expounded law as something sacred, to be met with one's every faculty alert, to be practiced with judicial impartiality and honor. In fact, honor had been Strongman's motto through life. It was a fetish with him, and the judicial bench a sanctuary for impartial justice to rich and poor alike. And his practice of his preachings had placed him in a position of profound respect among his fellows and the people at large. He stood for unswerving justice and probity.

So Tolliver worried over his friend's inexplicable act even as did the rest of Tiverton. But in Tolliver's acute distress for the blasting of a big career he almost lost sight of Tiverton's second mystery: the disappearance of Banker Delton.

For a month skilled detectives followed the scent of half a dozen false clues concerning the lost banker, to no avail. Jeremy Delton had disappeared as completely as though he had evaporated. Not a trace of his body could be found. Neither did the railroad or outgoing ships offer any help. Delton had merely joined a considerable army of the missing. There were many who believed that he had been cleverly murdered. For the banker was notably careless about money; he usually carried a large amount of currency on his person. Yet this suspicion did not carry them far. It could not be verified. Jeremy Delton had gone, whither apparently no man could nor would state.

II.

A MONTH after his retirement Judge Strongman at last broke the silence which had followed him into the country fifty miles away from Tiverton. From Graylands he wrote to his old friend Tolliver, inviting him up for a week-end.

The district attorney had been deeply perplexed over Strongman's silence. The judge, too, had dropped from sight almost as completely as had the missing banker. So with a strong feeling of relief Tolliver accepted the belated invitation and packed his bags, pondering much the while.

Strongman had written that he had taken the old Stranger estate, which lay four miles out from the village. Tolliver had not been called to Graylands for a decade. He dimly remembered the old Stranger estate, as rather lonesomely situated off the main road and surrounded by a high wall.

A truculent fellow from the village drove him over in a flivver which creaked and jangled dismally. The trail which swerved away from the pike was rough and little used. The farther he proceeded along the lonesome road, the more Tolliver wondered. Everything was so contrary to the Strongman he knew. The judge was not a solitary; for he disliked his own company, as he often used to say. Certainly his life on the bench had borne out his statement. He had lived in the old Strongman house with his nephew, Her-

bert Strongman, a fellow of thirty, a traveling salesman, who was much on the road. But during Herbert's frequent and prolonged absences the judge had entertained lavishly. There was scarcely a night when friendly lights did not shine forth with mellow hospitality from the big Colonial house.

As the car lurched from side to side, Tolliver wondered if young Strongman had been to this new house yet. He must know of the judge's extraordinary resignation, as he had left only the day before his uncle had withdrawn from the bench.

Further speculations were nipped by the appearance of the overgrown walls surrounding the Stranger estate. A veritable thicket hid the house from view, and the long drive seemed neglected and forlorn.

"How long since any one has lived in this house?" asked Tolliver, noting with a quick glance the many signs of neglect and disuse.

"H-m," answered the villager. "Going on to three years now. You see, the place ain't popular."

"What do you mean?"

The fellow shifted a cud of gum and expertly avoided a big stone in the road.

"Well, you see, the Colton murder put a blight on the house."

Tolliver's mind coursed back swiftly. The Colton murder. He recalled it. The crime had taken place three years ago in the old Stranger house—the name of the original owner still clung to the estate. Sarah Colton, a girl of twenty, the ward of Thomas Colton, had been murdered in a remote right wing of the rambling old dwelling. Money was the motive. And old Thomas Colton had gone to the chair for the crime.

"I do remember that Sarah Colton was killed here. But surely the commitment of the crime in the house can't be responsible for permitting a fine estate to fall to ruin for tenants."

"That's where you are wrong. A house that's staged a murder ain't so bad—but—there's something more." The villager lowered his voice.

"The house is haunted. The girl still cries out in the dead of the night

from the right wing where he killed her. I've heard it myself—that sharp, awful shriek. You can hear it to the very wall here—it's that loud and blood-curdling. That's why this place ain't popular. No one would live in it a week until he came. Must be a funny fellow, this judge. But I reckon the law hardens one to such things, else he couldn't stand it."

More and more perplexed, Tolliver saw the gray house shine out like some ghost from the past amid the thick evergreens which sentined it. As the car came to a raucous stop, the tall trees whispered and moaned. Tolliver felt suddenly chilly, although the sun had not yet set.

"Bosh! Fiddlesticks!" he spat out vehemently. "This haunted house stuff has just been magnified. If you heard anything, there's a reason for it."

The village chauffeur shrugged his shoulders and put his tongue in his cheek. As he stooped to crank his car he observed significantly: "Ask him. He knows. He looks as though he had seen a ghost already. And he's been here only a month."

Abruptly Tolliver flung himself up the stone steps. He was angry, yet impressed. And he was wrathful, because the idle gossip of the superstitious villager had got beneath his skin. He lifted the ponderous brass knocker and sounded it thunderously. It echoed and reechoed dismally through the isolated house. Again the pine trees whispered and rustled above him.

Judge Strongman was long in coming. When Tolliver heard the footsteps echoing down the stairs and across the hall he was struck by one thing. The heaviness of the footfalls was unnatural. For despite his six feet and his one hundred and ninety pounds of muscular avoirdupois, the judge had always been notably light and springy on his feet.

Mayhap some lazy servant approached the door.

Tolliver received a second surprise before the latter swung open. There was a rattling of chains and a clattering of heavy bolts. This too was unlike the judge he had known. His old friend had been physically fearless almost to the point of recklessness.

The door creaked open.

Judge Strongman stood there.

Tolliver caught his breath in acute surprise and perplexity.

The man before him had lost his erect and splendid bearing. He stooped slightly. And his former mass of dark hair was heavily streaked with gray. Lines traced the erstwhile healthy features, the robust coloring had been strangely sponged away. The judge's face was haggard and wan; the eyes were unnaturally brilliant, and looked beyond Tolliver at the disappearing auto. There was in their expression something sinister and apart from the man he had known.

"Come in, Tolliver," invited the judge, putting out a hand that was damp with clammy perspiration.

Even his bearlike grip had vanished as had the other familiar marks about him. His voice, too, had lost its hearty boom; it seemed muffled and hesitant.

Acutely embarrassed and distressed, Tolliver followed him into the dark hall. Strongman lighted a single gas jet which brought out only more plainly the melancholy neglect of the place. He led the way up the winding stairs, whose carpets were sadly worn and whose steps creaked protestingly under their weight.

"Come into my den," invited the judge, abruptly leading Tolliver to a door at the front of the house. Shadowy corridors stretched to the rear and right.

A fire burned on the grate in the big room which the judge had chosen for his retreat. This lent an air of cheerfulness to the dark paneled walls. Rows upon rows of the judge's books covered them. A big table in the center appeared in great disarray; a contrast to the methodical neatness of the jurist Tolliver had known. An open book lay face down upon the table.

Tolliver drew back in sharp surprise. "The Man Without a Country!" Strongman reading fiction, even of a classical cast. Why, his old friend had repeatedly stated that if he lived to be a hundred he could master only the rudiments of his profession. Hence, he had been indefatigable in his reading of law.

Strongman motioned him to a chair be-

fore the fireplace. He drew up another, proffering a box of cigars as he did so. But contrary to the former days of their comradeship, Strongman did not smoke. Then he had been a prodigious addict to the fragrant weed.

"I suppose," began the judge in that unfamiliar, hollow voice, "that you think I am off my head, Tolliver. But I'm not." His eyes glowed feverishly as his voice acquired a slight access of strength in the denial.

"I am naturally curious, David," answered the district attorney frankly. "Of course I am not such a fool as to think that there is anything the matter with your brain. What is the answer, though? What does it all mean? Why have you stopped at the height of your career to drop into oblivion like this?" His gesture covered the room.

The judge's long fingers fumbled nervously on his chair arm. "I—I need a rest," he said. "Guess I worked too hard for thirty years. And I've just begun to reap the consequences. I can't seem to eat or sleep. When warning signs like these crop out it's time to stop."

Covertly Tolliver studied him. He did look like a physical wreck. Why had the break come so suddenly without those usual indications which herald a collapse? A week before the judge's resignation, when he had declared that he was in the law for life, he had been a magnificent specimen of physical and mental health and of efficiency.

"What do you do here, David?" Tolliver asked, after a pause.

"Read mostly."

"Law?"

The judge shivered and paled. "No," his voice declared with a touch of its old-time vigor. "Anything but law."

With shocked realization Tolliver saw the look of strange distaste which flooded Strongman's face. This from the man who had but a month before loved and revered law as something sacred.

An awkward silence followed.

"Lucky I dropped out when I did," the judge's thin voice went on, "or I might have been asked to resign."

Pityingly Tolliver regarded him. Yet he

answered nothing. What was there that he could say?

So the evening dragged by, a nightmare to Tolliver in which he saw and heard a stranger who had once been his most intimate friend.

III.

THE judge showed him to a room at the front of the house next the den. Like the rest of the interior, dust and disuse were visible everywhere. Two windows opened onto the thick pine trees which effectively shut off the view. The night was dark, moonless. That eternal sighing of the pine branches began to prod Tolliver's nerves. Abruptly he lowered the shades and undressed in the dark. The sputtering gas would only accentuate the forlornness of the room. So with a heavy heart and a troubled mind Tolliver crawled beneath the covers. Even the bed squeaked mournfully. Everything seemed sadly out of tune in that solitary house.

Some hours later he suddenly started up. He reached for his watch with its illuminated face. The hands stood at twelve five. Although the windows had been tightly shut when he entered, he had opened one by dint of much coaxing before he retired. This window had been nearest the right wing which stretched out in the darkness.

Something had aroused him from sound, though troubled, slumber. He felt cold and acutely uneasy. Then he knew what had rudely awakened him.

On the night air he heard a long and melancholy cry. Once it came and then again. Then the thick silence settled down once more upon the place.

Tolliver crept to the window and poked his head out. The air was redolent with the scent of the pines. There was no wind. It seemed as though all Nature held her breath in hushed expectancy.

For ten minutes—fifteen—Tolliver waited breathlessly. Yet the melancholy wail did not recur.

At last he crept back into bed. For what seemed hours he pondered the meaning of that weird cry. He was a skeptic concerning all things supernatural. He had scoffed orally and mentally at the villager's story.

And now, in the dead of night, a chilling cry had emanated from that hapless, shadowed wing.

Deeply troubled, Tolliver at last fell asleep.

At breakfast he asked Strongman bluntly: "Did you hear anything in the night?"

He immediately regretted his hasty words. The judge's face became ashen. Cringing dread looked forth from those eyes which had but a month before been frank and fearless.

"What do you mean?" he asked in that thin voice so unlike his own.

"I thought I heard something, a cry for help, you know," explained Tolliver lamely.

The judge smiled feebly. "Probably you heard the owls hooting. The trees abound in them, screech owls. They can give a pretty good imitation of a human voice in distress."

"Then you don't believe in the haunt stuff?"

Why Tolliver phrased the question thus he did not know. It seemed childish and absurd to so interrogate even what remained of Judge Strongman.

"Probably you learned that down in the village," answered the latter slowly.

"I had forgotten that Sarah Colton was killed here," parried Tolliver irrelevantly, "until the driver told me. Her uncle paid the penalty for the crime, you will remember."

Judge Strongman bit his lips. "The village stories are idle gossip. You don't suppose I'd live in a haunted house, do you?"

Tolliver laughed mechanically. But he did not answer. Indeed, he could not say what manner of dwelling place the present David Strongman might seek for his home.

IV.

FOR days after he returned to the city Tolliver dwelt on the mysterious change which had overtaken his old friend. What had caused it? He could not say. For to the best of his knowledge and belief a man of Strongman's clean, normal habits and untroubled conscience should not be a victim of any wasting disease. As for Delton, Tiverton had given up the banker as in-

explicitly lost. The realm of the unknown had claimed him. And it kept its secret.

A week after Tolliver's return he was recalled to Graylands by a telegram which read:

Come at once. For God's sake, hurry!
D. S.

The message carried to Tolliver a strong sense of impending disaster. It was like a voice in mortal agony, a fantastic echo of that cry which he had heard in the darkness from the wing of the old Strongman mansion.

In great haste Tolliver obeyed the summons. Again he was driven to the isolated house in the pines by the same superstitious villager.

"Is the judge ill?" Tolliver asked him.

"Not to my knowledge. Nobody ever sees him except the grocer's boy who takes up supplies twice a week."

Tolliver rang the bell. He waited a long time and that shuffling footstep did not come downstairs. Eventually he heard a tapping overhead. One of the den windows directly above went up creakingly and something fell with a metallic click on the cold stone steps.

Tolliver stooped and picked up a massive key.

With mingled emotions he fitted it to the lock and opened the door. The bolts and chains had been removed prior to his arrival. And because some instinct told him that David Strongman had sought complete isolation in this dismal old house he locked and bolted the door behind him. Then he raced up the stairs.

He knocked lightly on the den door. Somehow he couldn't thrust himself upon Strongman in the old familiar way. A weak voice bade him enter.

Strongman sat in the big chair by the window; or rather, he sagged in it. And the change in him made Tolliver catch his breath. His face was ghastly, sunken and old. Weakly he raised his left arm.

"I've—I've had two attacks," he faltered. "The first was bad. But the one that came yesterday left me nearly helpless. When the first shattering illness gripped me just after you left, I felt that there

might be a recurrence. So I prepared." He indicated the canned goods littering the table at his elbow. There was a massive pitcher of water near by. "This morning when the grocer boy came I dropped a note and some money for him to send the wire to you. I'm glad you're here, Abraham."

"Why didn't you send for a doctor?" demanded Tolliver compassionately.

"I couldn't, until you came."

Tolliver stared at him. What did the delay mean? Was he losing his mind? Yet there was something in David Strongman's eyes he had never seen there before. Defeat, stark defeat glared forth. Utter ruin marked the pitiful human wreck before him.

"Well, now that I am here, I'll get a doctor at once."

"Wait!" The words were scarcely whispered. "Sit down. And listen. Promise me you will act as your highest honor bids you, when you have heard me."

Tolliver promised. He felt that he stood at the altar of some great revelation. And the thing moved him like the breath of some threatening wind.

"I did not come here," began Strongman weakly, "because I had tired of the bench. I did not come here because I needed physical rest. But I came here because I am no longer fit to fill the high office which I formerly held. I sat on my last case—"

"The people versus Michael Billings, accused of the murder of his brother," recalled Tolliver in an effort to aid the weak voice.

"No—I sat on my last case in my den at the old Strongman house two days after Jeremy Delton of the Tiverton National disappeared."

A hand like ice seemed to touch Tolliver's spine. What was Strongman saying? How could he hold trial in his own home? And what had the missing banker to do with it? Assuredly Strongman was delirious.

Tolliver stepped quickly toward the water. With difficulty Strongman held up an arresting hand.

"No, I have no fever—except a great fever of impatience to confess."

Confess! The word chilled Tolliver to his marrow. For the weakened man before him who had once fearlessly faced the world now spoke like a broken penitent.

"For God's sake hurry," blurted out Tolliver hoarsely, unconsciously repeating the exact phraseology of the telegram which had seared his mind.

"I am a criminal," stated Strongman brokenly. "I who had meted out justice and held the law inviolate during all of my life."

Like a frozen image, Abraham Tolliver heard him.

"Yes," continued Strongman, "for I purposely set out to defeat justice and to conceal crime. I know how Jeremy Delton came to his end."

"No, no!" exclaimed Tolliver. "You are mad. You don't know what you are saying."

"I am quite sane," declared Strongman. "And I confess now only because I am afraid that my days are numbered. I cannot die without telling the truth."

Beads of perspiration dampened the district attorney's brow.

"But I am the prosecuting attorney, not a priest," he declared. "Surely you do not forget who I am and for what I stand."

"I have no one but you to whom I may turn," the broken voice made answer.

There was something in its tones which gathered dignity and strength. It was the voice of the old Strongman who spoke. And the eyes of David looked out weary and wan, but steady and resigned.

Tolliver paced back and forth. He was fighting a mighty battle. Finally his heart overcame his reason. David had no one else to whom he might turn. He had bowed to the inevitable and placed matters in his old friend's hands. The legal aspect of the impending confession receded. The prosecuting attorney became a man again.

"I will listen, David," he agreed.

"No one loved justice as I," resumed Strongman. "And no one cared more for the honor of my name than I. You know that."

Tolliver nodded.

"I could not have the name of Strongman banded about for murder."

Tolliver clenched his hands. His mind reeled before the enormity of the thing he was facing.

"So I sat in judgment two days after Jeremy Delton had been killed, his body weighted and sunk into the mud of an old well—it does not matter where—it will never be discovered. I know that. But I could not go on pronouncing sentence against other criminals with the knowledge which burdened my heart. So I pronounced a sentence of imprisonment for life and left the bench forever. The name of Strongman will now be saved from disgrace."

"B-but—but—David," began Tolliver, "it was so unlike you to have done such a thing. I can't believe that you're a murderer, even with the confession on your lips."

A strange expression lighted Strongman's features. The fire of a great purpose glowed in his deep set eyes. And it was the voice of the old David Strongman that spoke out very quietly.

"You are right. I pronounced sentence on my nephew, Herbert Strongman. He killed Delton over some money troubles. Horrified at what he had done he confessed to me. He felt sure that his secret would be safe. His secret was safe. But his next long journey brought him here. I made him come. He now occupies the room of Sarah Colton, in solitary confinement. I was always a just man, Abraham, in pronouncing sentence. I could not have the name of Strongman go down for murder."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Tolliver, "you can't go on with this thing. If you had died before I arrived they would have found him here. Then the truth would have been out."

"No. Herbert is not all bad. He has begun to regret. And he is grateful to me for my verdict. If he had been found, he swore that he would pretend to be mad, violently insane, so that he should be incarcerated elsewhere and continue his sentence in a mad house."

"But now," began Tolliver, looking at

the wreck of the man before him, "everything is altered because I know. I must go to him."

"Why?" asked Strongman quietly.

Tolliver paced back and forth.

"I will tell him," he adjudged finally, "that you are very ill, that the strain has been too great—"

Strongman smiled strangely, as he interrupted:

"Tell him. I have no fear. He, too, was once a Strongman."

V.

As Tolliver paused before the massive door of the room at the end of the wing, a screech-owl shrieked mournfully from somewhere beyond. The sound had hardly died away when it was replaced by something else. And this did not come from outside.

Tolliver bit his lips in startled perplexity. For in the dead silence which had once more settled over the wing, he heard the murmur of voices low and persistent.

What could it mean? Who had entered there? The house was without servants. An ominous chill shook Tolliver. He stooped suddenly and applied his ear to the massive keyhole.

The words assumed form. A high, shrill voice in an odd monotone chanted:

"Ding, dong, bell. Pussy's in the well. Who put her in? Ha, ha, ha!"

Tolliver's blood almost congealed at the sound of that mad laugh.

The voice continued in a lower key, "Three blind mice—see how they run!" Then over and over again was repeated "Pussy's in the well," as though the re-

frain held a horrid fascination for some one within.

Tolliver applied an eye to the keyhole. A big window was opposite. A sodden, gray sky illuminated the room dully. But the shaft of light was sufficient.

In the path of it, on the floor beneath the window, sat a man plucking at his bare toes. As he raised his face even the low light was quite enough for the peering Tolliver. Long years of service as district attorney had shown him many forms of insanity, real and feigned. This was madness in its boldest form. And the gibbering being which he saw and heard had once been Herbert Strongman. And through Tolliver's mind sounded David's words, solemnly, almost prophetically, "If he had been found, he swore that he would pretend to be violently mad."

Yet here was no sham. This was stark reality. The words of a great philosopher had again been proved—"As a man thinketh." Herbert Strongman's confinement, his dawning realization of the consequences of his crime, the alternative he faced should his uncle die, all these had hammered away and broken his reason.

Tolliver sighed with devout thankfulness. Almighty nature had tried Herbert Strongman and had found him wanting. And she, with all the inexorableness of an implacable judge, had condemned and sentenced him to end his days in a madhouse. The law he had outraged would thus be satisfied. David Strongman's secret was safe. The family name would still shine forth with all the sterling integrity with which he and other Strongmans had vested it. The blot on the family escutcheon had been canceled by an all-wise and understanding nature.



T O - M O R R O W

ASHINING isle in a stormy sea,
We seek it ever with smiles and sighs;
To-day is sad. In the bland To-be
Serene and lovely To-morrow lies.

Mary Clemmer.

Origin of Sport

No. 3—BASEBALL

By W. O. McGEEHAN



THE popular belief is that baseball originated in the United States shortly before the Civil War and is indigenous to this country. This belief has been exploded by the recent excavations made by the expedition headed by Professor Anton Q. Goulashe, of the Budapest University, who has been digging for years on the upper reaches of the Nile. The handles of the shovels used in the Goulashe expedition are almost twice as long as the handles of the shovels in the Tut-ankh-Amen excavations, consequently the Goulashe expedition was able to go much deeper into the subject.

The first clew to the Egyptian claim to baseball was found in a set of tablets describing the sending out of ivory hunters by Ptolomey XIII, one of the wealthiest of the Pharaohs. Upon finding these tablets Professor Goulashe immediately set out to find out what use the ancient Egyptians made of ivory. At first his theory was that the ivory was cut into spheres and used in billiards or pool. But a patient search of the ruins of three cities disclosed neither billiard nor pool tables.

This would have stymied a less persistent investigator than Professor Goulashe. At first he thought that it must be an indication that Ptolomey XIII was a bit balmy, but the fact that this monarch had accumulated great wealth disproved his theory.

The mystery was solved when the expedition, in uncovering the ruins of an ancient wine shop, came upon two tablets which proved to contain the complete box score of a baseball game. It is the theory that some baseball writer of the period in leaving the ball park with these records of the game fell upon evil company and lost his scoring tablets in the place. The chisel with which he had so laboriously carved them out was found with the tablets which when translated told how Thebes had shut out Memphis in a ten inning game.

This made it clear that the ancient Egyptians used the term ivory in the sense it is used to-day, *i. e.*, meaning a person whose head is completely or partially solidified such as a recruit baseball player. The Egyptian ivory hunters, like the ivory hunters of modern times, were baseball scouts sent out to comb the minors for new players.

Naturally, the fact that the Egyptians had their own scouting system indicated that the league had been in existence for some time. In fact, it would seem as Charles Ebbets, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, said early this spring: "Baseball was only in its infancy at the time of the Pharaohs."

In an endeavor to trace the game of baseball back as far as possible Professor Goulashe made some interesting measurements of the pyramids. The manner in which these piles were laid out convinced the professor that the arrangement of the Valley of the Kings was merely the laying out of a huge baseball diamond.

He found conclusive evidence to back this theory when he traced the ruins of an old fence around the entire valley. At one end of the valley he came upon fragments of a set of antique turnstiles. Near this part of the ancient baseball stadium were found

small stone tablets with holes punched in them. This must have been the press gate and the tablets with the holes certainly must have been the Annie Oakleys of the ancients.

For the benefit of those who have not read Mr. One Eyed Connolly's brochure on gate crashing, an Annie Oakley is a pass or free ticket. It is called an Annie Oakley because it is punched full of holes to avoid its being counted with the paid tickets, consequently it resembles a target shot at by the famous American markswoman. In this commercial age Annie Oakleys become rarer every day.

Other evidence was uncovered to indicate that the game was highly developed in the league of the upper Nile. In one small pyramid was found the tomb of a shortstop of the Thebes Giants. The record indicated that he was the first man in the Egyptian League to steal second with the bases full.

From the hieroglyphics carved on his sarcophagus this so infuriated the multitude at the game that they built a pyramid around him and walled him in without waiting for the formality of his death. This, Professor Goulashe maintains, indicates that the Egyptian fans were quite as impulsive as those of St. Louis, who never attend ball games without an armful of pop bottles ready to register their protests against poor decisions or bonehead plays.

It is because of this simple impulsiveness of the ancient Egyptians that the Valley of the Umpires, where the arbiters of the former national pastime of Egypt are buried, is much more cluttered up than the Valley of the Kings. A king had a chance.

The mummies of the umpires were easily distinguished by the peculiar dents in their skulls. Instead of serving pop in bottles—for the art of glass blowing had not been developed in Egypt at the time—the beverage was sold in heavy pottery jars, consequently one direct hit usually accomplished its mission, the direct recall of the umpire.

In one of the tablets uncovered was a petition in behalf of the Umpires' Association of the upper Nile calling for pop to be sold in goatskins. It seems that this petition was turned down by Ptolomey XIII on the ground that the Egyptians after spending all morning making bricks for pyramids had earned the right to any innocent merriment they might get out of beaming the umpire.

While the peanut had not yet come into its own, evidence was found which showed that the coconut was sold to customers during the games. Fragments of petrified sausage found in the ruins of the stone bleachers proved that the hot dog was not unknown to the ancients and that the civilization of ancient Egypt was of a particularly high order.

This entirely disproves the theory of the great Chinese writer, Chow Mein, who claimed that hot dog as a food originated during the reign of the Mings in ancient China. In refuting the Chow Mein theory Professor Goulashe points out that it would be impossible to handle a hot dog with chop sticks. Also, Professor Goulashe demands, if the Mings really had knowledge of hot dogs, why is it that none of the vases of the Ming period contains any designs indicating things such as hot dogs in links?

At just what period the ancient Egyptians abandoned the game of baseball it seems impossible to discover. There is an interesting myth in connection with this which Professor Goulashe gives for what it is worth. It seems that the ancient Egyptians had only one baseball which was popularly believed to have been cast into the diamond by Isis.

This baseball was guarded zealously by the Pharaohs and taken from its golden case only when games were to be played. For this reason the walls of the baseball parks at Thebes and at Memphis were as far flung as possible. Such a thing as a home run was made practically impossible.

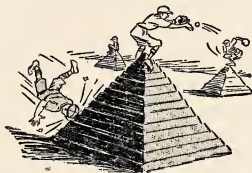
It was during the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Ptolomey XIII that the ivory hunters for the Thebes nine purchased a left-handed right fielder, a Nubian called Babe-ankh-Ruth. The solidity of his skull,



THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MUFF.

which was tested by the hardened bronze chisels of the period, indicated that he was a great ball player, and the bleachers and stands in the Valley of the Kings were crowded at his first appearance in the big Egyptian League.

In the ninth inning Memphis was leading by 3 to 0 when their pitcher went wild and walked three men, filling the pyramids which served as bases. This brought Babe-ankh-Ruth to bat. After two strikes had been called on him and two umpires had been carried off the field, Babe-ankh-Ruth got hold of one and drove it over the right field wall. The ball dropped into the Nile and was devoured by a crocodile. This ended baseball in Egypt and the secret of the pastime died with the Egyptian art of embalming.



THEY WERE INCONVENIENCED WHEN SLIDING BY
KNOCKING THEIR HEADS AGAINST
THE PYRAMIDS.

Coincident with the rediscovery of baseball it would seem that the art of Egyptian embalming is also on the point of being revived, for students of the game have discovered that many of the ball players appear to have been embalmed from the neck up.

When the game was revived at Cooperstown, New York, the first innovation to meet modern conditions was the substitution of canvas bags at the bases instead of pyramids which were used by the hardy Egyptians. The modern players complained that they were inconvenienced when sliding by knocking their heads against the pyramids. Unfortunately, the magnates listened to these complaints and from that time on the modern baseball players have become more

and more effete. Gloves, chest protectors and shin guards were subsequently introduced.

Professor Goulashe, who is an authority upon anatomy as well as on Egyptology, declares that these changes were unwarranted. He proved this by comparison of the skull of an Egyptian southpaw with that of one of comparatively modern times. The comparison showed that the skull of the modern ballplayer was a quarter of an inch thicker.

Some absurd claim has been made that the American game of baseball was derived from an English game called "Rounders." This was routed by Professor Goulashe, who discovered that there was no game called rounders. This was a mere typographical error. The game was called bounders because of the persons who played it.

It is a strange coincidence that the game appeared in America immediately before the Civil War. It is also interesting to note that they have a civil war in St. Louis after every ball game.

SECOND PLACE

YOU change your heart, ma belle coquette,
As easily as your glove,
And I know you'd pine and pout and fret
In the chains of a lifelong love.

If we were married, you'd flirt with Jim,
Or whoever the man might be;
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For then you'll flirt with me.

Harry Romaine.



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